NAPHTALI

OR

THE YOUNG BONDMAN

...ANDA PYLE MICHENER

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NAPHTALI;

OR,

THE YOUNG BONDMAN.

BY

AMANDA PYLE MICHENER.

"Knowledge by suffering entereth,
And life is perfected by death."

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PREFACE.

THE following Bible story, through which a thread of romance is interwoven, was written in 1887. It was suggested to me by the reading of "From Night to Light," by B. E. E. I was so enchanted with the story that it seemed to haunt me, until I felt impelled to give it to the public in the form of verse.

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CHAPTER I.

DRIFTING TOWARDS BABYLON.

"HOLD! To the right there, Naphtali! Are you dreaming?"

The sweet chant instantly ceased,
And a bright flash kindled the young Jew's eye,
As with the unmerited rebuke
He sees his stern master come nigh;

But the heavy cloud of captivity hangs low
As swiftly down the current they go.
Sadly musing, the young boatman guides his craft along,
As he sings, the while, the sweet praises of David's song.

Like slender needle-points the turrets of Babylon
rise,
And the snow-crowned hills grow dimmer
In the distance of the skies.

While his companion at the bows
Toys idly with his floating oars,
A well-worn parchment from his belt
Naphtali takes and o'er its contents pores:
"Through God, valiantly we shall do,
For he it is who our enemies will pursue."

The wily Assyrian standing close by
Is guarding him ever with a watchful eye.
The songs of David scarce does the boy begin
When his master, saying, "A traitor's song are those
you sing,"
Snatches the roll and flings it far into the river.
"That was my only copy," the boy's lips murmur,
with a quiver.

Naphtali, with a wistful eye,
Sees the fragment floating by.
His master then spoke threatening words
Which oft before this Jew had heard.
Grief in his breast is struggling now
As he sees his parchment onward flow;
The only copy of King David's psalms
His master has snatched from his fair young hands.

Wafted down on the wings of the wind,
These words to his troubled soul come in :
"*Righteousness and judgment executeth the Lord to all that are oppressed.*"

These words are as the voice of a faithful friend,
They rebuke his spirit and comfort send ;
This thought arises within his mind :
"The parchment yet I still can find ;
Written deep down within my heart I it can see ;
It is not wholly lost to me."

With a dying blessing the aged Ithamar
Had placed it in his hand,
And with sorrow he sees it borne
Away at the wind's command.

Into the very heart of Babylon
The little craft is floating on ;
Naphtali rouses from his reverie, knowing
His parchment now is gone.

A most beautiful picture rises before him now,
As he watches the beauty of the sunset's glow ;
Like emerald arches mounting heavenward,
The Hanging Gardens rise ;
Their foliage, as it were, in mid-air
Striving to clasp the earth-clods
With the bright blue of the skies.

In its own grand setting of parks and gardens fair
Stands the palace of the king in its beauty there.
On the western banks, tower above tower,
He sees the majestic temple of Belus rise,
Pointing to a bewildering height
Its turrets to the skies.

Around each lordly mansion, each humble dwelling too,
Are thrown invincible walls,—invincible
Save where, as a keen sabre's edge, cuts the great river through.

Now the huge brazen gateway shuts out
The magnificent scene,
As the dropping of a heavy curtain;
Picture and parchment are forgotten,
For the busy present cometh in between.

CHAPTER II.

TIDINGS OF WAR.

"THERE! Naphtali, be swift of foot, these bottles
Of palm wine must be delivered to-night;
Take them to the merchant's, and see to it aright."

Silent obedience he knew would best his master please;
Quickly the leathern bottles were packed and borne with ease.
A strange commotion in the streets there seemed to be,
Which, his curiosity aroused, he fain would see.

To the merchant's eagerly he hastened,
And, unloading his tray,
"What is the cause of all this commotion?"
He to the waiting-maid did say.

"Why, have you not the news of the courier heard?
Darius the Mede has summoned Cyrus of Persia,
And this great commotion stirred.
Their troops will join in besieging our city.
If this be true, they will spare no eye to pity."

From within, a sudden call hastened the servant
away,
While Naphtali quickly raised his empty tray.

On every side eager, excited voices greeted him,
And, as the armory he passed, a clattering of
Shields and spears he heard within.
The brazen gate closed with a loud harsh sound
Just as Naphtali into the boat stepped lightly down.
He well knew, if one minute later he had been,
The displeasure of his master he would have incurred
again.

Drawing a deep sigh of relief, he to his comrades
said,
"Soon in the city will be heard the armies' noise
and tread."
With intense interest listened they to Naphtali's news,
And no time in reporting to their captain did they
lose;
Eager to learn more, scanned they the closéd gates
And watched the city lights;
But nowhere any unusual sound
Detected they that night.

Naphtali his evening supplications did repeat,
But slumber with the asking to him that night was
not meet.
The very stars above him, shining bright,
Like sentinels, seem watching for the coming fight.

Would the morrow's sun on the vast plains of Shinar
Reveal those countless legions of the coming war?
The walls were so strongly built, a long time the
siege might last;
Perhaps they would die of starvation before the war
was past.

His little orphan sister was watching for him with
an eager eye;
Weeks might change to months
And months to years might fly,
Before again from him she the news would learn;
Then the thought came sadly, perhaps he would
ne'er return.

"*Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.*"

On the midnight stillness, these words to him were
as a voice;
Although his parchment now was gone,
They made his heart rejoice.

While the watchful Assyrian was sleeping sound,
And the stars on Naphtali were looking down,
Suddenly his attention was arrested by a falling star
Verging towards the sleeping city
As it descended from afar.

The thought came to his mind with wonderful force,
"Prophetic this star now is in its course,"
"*O Lucifer, son of the morning,*
From heaven how art thou fallen!"
Had not the patriarch to him foretold
The ruin of the golden city?

The strange thought of a coming battle,
In which he too might take a part,
Filled his soul with pity.
The end of the seventy years' captivity so close at hand,
The new light about to dawn, upon a captive band,
The fall of Babylon, so long the glory of kingdoms,
should he it see
With his own eyes, as Ithamar had declared that it
would be?

On the gate-way the waning moon lit up the huge
lion's head:
It seemed to him like a vision, that together
The lamb and the lion should lie down in their bed.

Falling asleep, in his dreams Naphtali strove
To arouse his sleeping mate,
But in the rosy light of the morning sun
He found himself awake.

Not a word of the prophetic strain escaped his lips,
For all his companions Assyrians were to the finger-
tips.

So Naphtali in his heart quietly pondered these
words o'er.
With the swinging back of those great gates
His comrades stepped on shore.

Now, of this young captive let me you a picture
give:
Beside his stalwart companions, a mere child
And slender built he is.
The eighteen summers of his clouded life
Had moulded both his heart and mind,
True manliness he had acquired,
And a character pure and kind;
An open countenance with olive cheeks before us
rise,
Dark waving locks and wistful, restless eyes:
Now you have Naphtali's face
In all its beauty and winning grace.

Doubly he was orphaned now:
His mother's death had left him so.
He was surrounded by every influence to draw him
away
From the God his father taught him ever to
obey.
Forsake his cherished faith, will he?
Let us follow him through a few years of his life
and see.

The returning boatmen eagerly they greet:
"Have you any tidings heard to-day along the street?
Is there an active battle or a siege at hand?
What has been the order of the king's command?"
"Along the eastern horizon something has been seen."
"Have they yet apprised Belshazzar our great king?"

His soldiers, as locusts, stood in numbers there;
Why should they change countenance for battle to prepare?
With disciplined soldiery and granaries heaped,
Why borrow trouble for fear of defeat?
Thus reasoned Belshazzar in his great pride,
From the heart-stricken people the panic to hide.

CHAPTER III.

VICTORY OR DEFEAT?

"For naught have you labored, lads," said the
captain,
As their morning work noticed he;
"Up the river we will not go till after the siege,
For such, I foresee, there will be."

Carefully the merchandise was packed away,
And he proceeded to hire out his crew that very day.
Naphtali pleasing work had assigned unto him:
In the beautiful Hanging Gardens he was to begin.

And, as he walked through the streets of the city,
With a heart full of love
And an eye full of pity,
Mused thus: "If the king secure can feel within
this wall,
Why should a shadow o'er our hearts fall?"

To all outward appearance, ease and luxury greeted
his keen eye;
In the dust at his feet a golden tassel low did lie,
From the trappings of some richly-caparisoned horse;

Stooping to pick it up again,
The prophetic words of Isaiah to him came:
"*Come down and sit in the dust. . . .*
O daughter of the Chaldees."

Envying not the gay youths that passed him by,
He gazed on them with a wistful eye,
For he longed to warn them of danger to come,
That their golden idols they might lay down.
Deep down in his heart he hoped that they might see,
Beside the God of Israel, no other God could be.

Now he approaches the gardens fair,
To attend his daily labor there;
A most beautiful picture meets his eye,—
Terrace above terrace rising high;
All about him floats the sweet perfume of rich exotics rare,
And the sweet singing of the birds;
In those gardens fair,
Pure, soft breezes stir the foliage of the trees;
Surely, the garden of Eden could no fairer be than these.

But, oh! no sweating of the brow had ever there been found,
No thought of care or labor, no tilling of the ground.
And from his people God his countenance did not keep.

Just then a ripe rich pomegranate
Fell low down at his feet,
Interrupting his reverie: it would quench
His burning thirst, he thought;
But Eve's transgression arose within his mind,—
Had not her sin much trouble brought?

A rich young nobleman, passing by that way,
Plucked some of the luscious fruit, and thus to him
did say,—
"I trow thou wert thinking of something more
Than the pomegranate thou hast just passed o'er."
And he tossed one far more red and rare
Into the young Jew's hand so fair.

With his countenance beaming bright,
Naphtali, looking into his face with pure delight,
Said, "Thinking I was, my lord, had not Eve
Listened to the tempter's voice,
Would not God some day more than made her heart
rejoice?"

"Ah, a Hebrew lad I see thou art;
How canst thou believe, not having seen
This God in whom thou claimest a part?"

"Thy soul I do not see, my lord, but one I know
thou hast;
Thy God is the great Belus now, but that will not
always last."

"But, my lad, is Israel's God more powerful
Than Belus, who is clothed with the sun?"
"Our God, at his command,
A whole day, still bade the sun to stand."

"A bold defender I see thou art
Of this God in whom thou hast a part;
But tell me this marvellous thing, when was it done,
That your great God could stay the sun?"

Then the boy, in tones low and sweet,
The command of Joshua did repeat;
Soon adding, with earnestness and worth,—
"*O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!*"

But how rash, thought he, this to repeat
To a Babylonian, I'm sure it is not meet.
But this young Shethar had a large, good heart;
With delight and wonder in these words he took a part.
"More of these strange, majestic songs, I soon must hear;
On the morrow to my palace come,—it is quite near."

"On the morrow to your palace I would gladly come,
But my present master's work I must have done."
Then the rich young nobleman inquired of he,—
"Who may thy master, my young lad, now be?"
"Beriah, my lord, from the city of Is."

This merchant then, to the young Jew did say,—
" With me canst thou not come from thy master soon
away,
And be the servant of Shethar, my lad?"
Naphtali's young heart now felt glad.

" I would with great joy your servant be,
But my little sister,—what of her, you see?
I would rather far with Beriah stay
Than leave her with that cruel master and go
away."

" You have a little sister, then; we must have her
too."
A flush on Naphtali's cheeks now grew.
As soon as the crew up the river went,
Rachel to Babylon would be sent.
Naphtali his new master now obeyed,
For soon the changes had been made.

Shethar with deep interest listens now
To the wonderful history of the young Jew,
And he notes it down on tablets of clay
With an iron pen, henceforward to stay.
The despised casket Naphtali unlocks with a magical
key;
Now inexhaustible wealth in those heart-stirring
songs he doth see.

In all the lore of priest and scribe,
The like he had never heard;
Those sweet songs and chants of David
His very soul now stirred.

Naphtali, he thought, must learn
To accompany his voice with the lyre,
So he bade him go for the instrument,
That sweet music his voice might acquire.

But no sooner had he obeyed his lord's command
Than he saw in the glittering sunlight
The enemy near at hand.

Descending quickly from the house-top with the lyre,
He informed his master that the enemy was
Approaching the vast plains of Shinar,
And would soon reach the city walls.
At the king's command every one to his post now falls.

The young nobleman full well knew
There was one among the number would prove true.

Shethar hastens now away
At the command of the king, his order to obey.
His young favorite he appoints a shield to wear;
A coat of armor, and a sword he'll bear.

Naphtali takes his place in the gorgeous chariot as one in a dream,

And nearer and yet nearer the martial strains of music
to him seem.
The bright pennons now float gayly in the breeze,
Ready for a grand festival, instead of carnage,
seemeth these.
But now the chariots into ready line do fall,
While horsemen swift and spearmen come marching
all.
As the incoming tide of the ocean,
The Persians steadily advance,
And the beautifully-equipped horses,
In their delight gayly prance.

The chanting of the priests with the holy fire,
Can almost now be heard;
And the vast body of light-armed troops
With archers and chariots now are stirred.
Now quivers the golden eagle of Cyrus in the light,
As if pluming its wings for victory in the coming fight.

A vision of little Rachel's face to Naphtali came,
And, brushing off a blinding tear,—
"Shall I see her e'er again?"

With a firmer grasp he clinched the huge iron shield,
And then began the battle that ensued upon the field.
Within the walls the Babylonians hastily retreat
again,
While Shethar's horses, with his fallen charioteer,
Lie dying on the plain.

Shethar leaves the field without a single wound;
But an arrow pierced the young shield-bearer,
Leaving a slight but unprotected one.

Loud lamentations greet them now on every side,
While the fearful prophecies in Naphtali's heart abide.
"But," thought he, "were it not for this slight twinge of pain,
This terrible battle would seem almost like a dream."

All over the city recklessness and revelry did endure,
But within those strong invincible walls
Belshazzar felt himself secure.
Had they not enough provisions
Laid up for twenty years?
Why should they then afflict themselves
With needless cares and fears?

As months passed by, the besieging army
Labored all in vain,
Their battering-rams of assault
Against the strong walls came.

Yet those strong walls seemed impervious
To every fierce attack,
And in bitter disappointment
The Persians were kept back.

Naphtali learned to wake sweet strains upon the lyre,
And his progress was watched with growing interest
By young Shethar.

But one day a great trial to him came
That gave him much anxiety and pain.
His master gave to him a song to learn
That shocked his inmost soul in return.

"*Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.*"

He wanted still his master to obey,
But he must put those heathen songs away;
He resolved not to do the wicked thing,
And with a resolute heart a denial to his lips did bring.

Gaining admittance to his presence, now
Before his master Naphtali low did bow,
Saying, "I have a favor great to ask of thee:
I cannot learn those songs thou gavest me.
My lord, thou knowest I was born a Jew.
I beg pardon, but those songs I cannot sing,—
Songs dedicated to your heathen god and king."

Shethar's countenance fell, and to the young Jew he did say,—
"Your post of honor shall be taken from you this day.

From my presence, unthankful boy,
You now must go,
And among my menials your place
Henceforth you shall know."

As, with a bursting heart, Naphtali turned away,
His bandaged limb his master saw,
And to him thus did say,—
"I acknowledge you have faithful been in every task
Assigned to you except the last;
Soon as your rash words you repent
Back to your post you shall be sent."

With meekness in his tone, now Naphtali spoke,—
"My lord, among your menials I will gladly work;
But, oh, my lord, I cannot take again
Words that have given me much pain."

The firmness of the boy, Shethar could not help but see,
And honor stamped upon his brow he felt would
ever be.

With a clear conscience, but a heavy heart,
He hung up his lyre;
Full well he knew the other slaves
On his young life would jar.

He must leave the magnificent halls,
And with spade and hoe
Among the sun-bronzed laborers forth must go.

He being the nobleman's favorite,
They had regarded him long with a jealous eye.
What could he now expect of them?
But to be faithful he would ever try.

Many jeering questions would greet him on every side;
But with the God of Israel he could his sorrows hide.
As days and weeks passed by,
Their friendship he had won;
Oft with deeds of kindness, to him they now would come.

One he found among this motley number
Who made his young heart glad:
This Ishbak showed in his very face
Some Jewish traits he had.

The piercing gaze of his jet-black eye,
And the far-sighted look that in it did lie,
The compressed lips and outline
That his whole countenance had,
Showed an unsubdued and proud spirit
That rebelled in this young lad.

A Jew intellectually, he believed in God
As a mighty king;
But those grand prophetic strains
That filled Naphtali's bleeding heart
No comfort to him did bring.

He knew nothing of God as a loving
Father and unseen friend;
No wonder the dark cloud of captivity
Had not one rift of blue for him.
The past, he saw, was impenetrable gloom.
But Naphtali's range was wider;
Often pure light to him would come.

Two years now had passed away
Since with uncongenial friends he had to stay.
At last his daily labor was growing irksome,
But the rifts in the clouds would widen, he thought,
ere long.
Many leisure hours he had spent in writing,
On tablets of plastic brick, David's sweet song.

So the great God led him up to manhood,
And in after years he realized in very truth
How good a thing it is to bear the yoke in youth.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL.

NAPHTALI and his fellow-laborers were
Excavating an artificial pond one day;
While talking among themselves,
Each to the other thus did say:

"This night at the king's palace a great feast there
will be,
With a thousand lords; among them our master you
will see."

"I wonder how the king's heart can be so merry,
When such great danger is near at hand."
"Nothing worth mention have we seen as yet,
But still the besiegers are not idle in our land."
"Except the defeat in the outset, a different story
These two years have told."
"You'll find they are not working in vain
As all this digging will unfold."

"Indeed," exclaimed the first speaker,
"Since you are so wise, you may be able to tell
when
This work of spading and digging will end."

Ishbak answered with a look of haughty disdain,
But to Naphtali, as yet, these words
Gave neither trouble nor pain.

But with terrible force they were to come to him soon:
As he lay on his couch that night,
A sudden cry of alarm did to him come.

"To arms! fight for your lives! the enemy at last
Has entered the gate;
For plunder and destruction at the palace
Of the king they wait."
Is it a dream, a terrible nightmare,
That rouses Naphtali from his slumber there?
Ah, no; the clatter of armor, the aimless
Running hither and thither,
And the piercing cries from the street,—
All confirm the worst apprehensions;
The enemy they now must meet.

Why, his master at the king's palace too would be!
He would wear his coat of armor and hasten there to see.
Quick to the armory he runs, his coat of mail puts on;
Seizing sword and shield, out in the street is gone.

Hastening to the king's palace, through
By-ways and thick shrubbery he goes

With noiseless footsteps; the Persian soldiers
Have not yet discovered him, he knows.

"But, hark! was that the wind rustling among the
trees?"
Distinct, yet more distinct, now grows the sound.
Dark forms pass close beside him, as breathless with
suspense
He crouches in the shadow low upon the ground.

"Ho! comrades, is not this for the Medes
And Persians a most glorious night?
Who would have thought to turn the river,
Who but our great commander in the fight?
All covered are the treasures there," he hears them
say,
As the retreating sound of their footsteps dies away.

He hastens on with swifter steps and
Enters the almost deserted halls;
But, oh, the awful sight that meets his eye!
For mercy, the lofty colonnades seem
Supplicating heaven, with arms
Outstretched on high.

Naphtali shudders as he recognizes here and there
Some bleeding, wounded face;
Could it be that his dear master lay dying
Here in such a place?

Quickly from room to room he hastens
Until, by the sudden gleam of a dying torch,
He Lord Shethar spies,
For much of pain and misery the awful darkness hides.
His master's bleeding wounds he binds
And a quiet resting-place for him finds.
The dark clouds and gloom now shade the night;
Naphtali watches beside his master until the morning light.

All about him lay the bodies of the slain.
Ever and anon from distant halls
The wails and moans of the dying came.
"Can such destructive work perform God's will?"
Yet he cannot doubt the prophecy, trusting still:
"*God's ways are past finding out.*"

"But how had the besiegers entered the city?"
Then the words of the soldiers came to
His mind with wonderful force;
He remembered now how they spoke
Of the river being turned in its course.

"Though mighty as Cyrus, how could a man
Move the great stream?"
Perplexity and doubt trouble his mind,—
"What does it mean?"

This was the longest and dreariest night
He ever had known;
What if his master should die before dawn?

He bends his ear, and low, still breathings from him
come;
"*Cast thy burden upon the Lord*"
Come the words from David's song.

"You are faithful, my boy, to stand by
Your master in such an hour.
Who but your Israel's God could have given you
such power?
Ah! Naphtali, your God is a great God
Indeed; we have seen his power this night.
Listen, I will tell you about it before the morning
light.
Belshazzar from the temple of your God
His table with gold and silver graced,
Praising our gods before to his lips these sacred cups
he placed.
And, oh, Naphtali, I took one in my
Hand and touched it with my impious lips;
Pray to your God, I beseech you,
That he will pardon me this."

A distant sound from some corridor came
Of a fellow-sufferer writhing in pain.
Groping about in the glimmering light of the com-
ing dawn

To the place where the sound arises,
Naphtali hastens on.

He lifts the mangled and bleeding forms one by one
Until, unscathed by a single wound,
He raises a drooping soldier from almost a living tomb.
Nothing but the motions of the Persian soldier
Can Naphtali understand,
But he hopes to find in him
One whom he can command.

So he points with earnest gestures and all
The beseeching eloquence of a Jewish eye,
Thus he draws him to his wounded master's side near by.
The soldier, glad to prove his gratitude,
In broken Assyrian now,
More plainly shows his willingness
And to Naphtali's wishes bow.

A Persian soldier he has rescued, it is true;
But what is nationality in such a place?
The warrior recognizes in him a deliverer;
Bound by one common tie in suffering
Is all the human race.
A rough litter soon they form
And tenderly place Naphtali's master thereon.

That the rich nobleman may attract no curious
eye,
The Persian soldier throws his cloak
Around him as they hastily pass by.
Out of the charnel-house they bear him
To the street below,
Through the disordered troops, to Shethar's home
they go.
Now Shethar's eyes grow wild with anxious
fear,
For not a living soul of all his household doth ap-
pear.
His head droops heavily, and the
Bearers pause now in dismay,
For the plunderers have borne his wife
And little son away.
Is there nothing left to give a clue
To their sad fate?
Naphtali, with an anxious look,
Bids the Persian soldier wait.
The soldier a rough exterior had,
But also a kindly heart.
Naphtali, with a lady's robe and a
Child's necklace, bids him now depart.

Pointing to his master, he places the bauble
In the soldier's hand;
As his eye wanders through the desolate halls,
He easily understands.

Naphtali thinks it doubtful
Whether soldier or garment again he'll see,
But a thought flashes through his mind,—
"It possibly yet may be
That the lady and child will
Be recovered in this way."
Shethar's faint voice breaks the silence:
"Have you heard of my loved ones, pray?"

"For your innocent, helpless ones, God will tenderly
care,
And your great sorrow with you he will surely
share."

"Say not so: I have offended your just God, you see;
And our great Belus, he has forsaken me."
"Oh, my lord, he is merciful and just
If in him we only put our trust."

"Oh, could I hear of my loved ones again!
'Tis but another punishment from your God, this
pain."

"Wait," says Naphtali, "till the tumult
Has quieted down,
And perhaps your loved ones for you will be found."

"Naphtali, the bright side you always see;
But listen, the rest of my story I will tell to thee.

Scarce had we sipped from the sacred cups,
When before us came the fingers of a hand
Writing strange, awful words:
Immediately in every heart a dreadful fear was stirred.
Belshazzar quaked with awful fear
When this strange vision did appear,—

'*Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin.*'

"In amazement I looked upon these words
That shone so bright;
Never before in all my researches had I seen
Such dazzling light.

"Now among the astrologers that were
Quickly summoned to come,
Not one could interpret this writing
In the banquet-room.
But the queen-dowager of Daniel's fame had heard,
And to the king's palace she hastened with this word.
The interpretation thereof Daniel soon did give.
Never till my dying day can I the look outlive
That rested upon the face of Belshazzar the king
When Daniel the meaning thereof to him did bring.
The king brought forth the scarlet robe for him to wear,
With the golden chain, and the third ruler
Made him in his kingdom fair.

The rest of the story, Naphtali, you well know,—
How the enemy slew our king and did into his
palace go."

Through the whole of Shethar's recital Naphtali
saw,
And, as his master paused, exclaimed, with reveren-
tial awe,—
"*O God! how great is thy majesty!*
How terrible are thy judgments!"

At the decline of the setting sun,
Shethar bade Naphtali to the house-top go;
Very anxious the nobleman was to know
How the city fared below.

The strange appearance of the great river
Was the first thing that attracted Naphtali's eye;
The soldier's remark came again to his mind,—
About turning the river dry.
Cyrus through the river-bed
Had found an entrance into the city,
Where he had great destruction made
And showed no signs of pity.

As he passed the corridor, he a glimpse
Of the soldier has seen,
Minus robe and necklace;
In one hand iron fetters, and a scroll
In the other, he doth bring.

'Tis an order for the Babylonian to lay down his arms
And swear allegiance to the Persian king;
Then his slaves, his wife, and child, to him they'll bring;
And a high reward shall also be given
To him who has saved the life of a Persian:
Otherwise, in arms they henceforth must stay
Until the conqueror they learn to obey.

The oath of allegiance, with troubled brow,
The proud Babylonian signéd now.
Naphtali his hand to the parchment gives,
But no reward from them will receive.
From bondage his loved ones soon are released,
And again to his household cometh peace.

CHAPTER V.

BOUND FOR THE CITY OF IS.

Up the river in the city of Is
Very little of the commotion of Babylon has been heard.
Of little Rachel Naphtali has as yet learned not one word.

Let us look in upon Beriah's thrifty household and see
If among the number our little Jewish maiden there will be.

Among the busy row of maidens a sad sweet face,
Naphtali's very own, with all his winning grace.

With dizzy head and aching arms twirling the distaff, her thus we see,
"Here, Rachel," said the directing woman,
"To the house-top go and bring some bundles back to me."
Glad of a change and always willing to obey,
With alacrity she hastens to her work away.

As she watches the strips of blue
In the distance fade away,
The thought arises in her mind,—
"Oh, how long will he stay?"

Every day that has past
Since two long years ago,
She has lived over the last good-by
Of the brother that loved her so.

How tenderly he whispered that sweet word "Mizpah,"
Telling her he would repeat it every night
As soon as the first evening star
Should put forth its shimmering light.

Little Rachel was thinking still of the blue waters
That bore him far away,
As she hastily descended from the roof that day.

Losing her balance, the whole length
From the top she fell;
And of the result the future soon will tell.

Naphtali cannot now contented be
While Shethar's promise remembers he,
That from Beriah little Rachel should be bought,—
'Twas day and night his constant thought.

Strengthened by prayer, he resolved to go
And let his sympathizing master know
That he wanted now to redeem his sister dear,
Although to him the way did not seem clear.

With his master's permission in earnest he was bent,
And straightway on his labor of love he went.

"Naphtali, you have well earned your sister's freedom and your own
Since into my household you have come;
Under the Persian yoke you yet must be,
But from Babylonian slavery I will set you free."

Keen sorrow mingled now with joy,
As Naphtali bade his master adieu.
It would weary us to follow him day by day
His tiresome journey through.

Everywhere his eye rested upon the devastating army's reign;
Here and there were trodden fields and barren wastes of grain.

The river, too, seemed a conquered thing to be
Since Cyrus' triumph o'er the city he did see.
An entrance into the city of Belshazzar's pride they had found;
The prophecies must be fulfilled and God's word abound.

To the deep, "Be dry!" he had said;
"For Cyrus I will dry up the river's bed;
Cyrus, my shepherd, as he waits,
Before him will open the two-leaved gates."

No wonder that Naphtali's hopes for his captive nation grew
As through the unsettled country his tedious journey he did pursue.

At last, in spite of his many detentions,
He reached the city of Is.
"In almost three years how little Rachel must have changed!"
These thoughts were his.

A soldier informed him that Beriah's family
As captives had been taken far away.
"What! not all the Hebrew captives?"
Exclaimed Naphtali in dismay.

"A little cripple here I think you'll find,
Whom with our captain they have left behind."

"This little cripple is a stranger unto me;
My sister was beautiful and strong, you see."

As the heavy footsteps of the soldier die away,
A faint sound of music cometh to his ear:

"A table thou preparest before me in the presence
of mine enemies,"
Came the sweet words soft and clear.

Wondering much at the low, pathetic voice he heard,
Thoughts of his own sweet little sister in his heart
were stirred.

Opening wide the door, inside the court he quickly
stands;
Busily engaged at work with the distaff in her
hands,
In the midst of a group of soldiers who were gath-
ered round,
Singing those sweet touching songs, little Rachel there
he found.

With mingled joy and sorrow he beheld her sitting
there,—
His fragile little sister, once so strong and fair.

"The sweet song of the singer has brought me here;
Dost thou recognize thy brother, Rachel dear?"

That tall, bearded man whom she just now has seen
Cannot be Naphtali: it must surely be a dream.

But stooping down to clasp her in his strong embrace,
With joy she smiles upon her loving brother's face.

His unceremonious entrance the soldiers now alarm ;
Their captain quick is sent for to keep them safe
from harm.
As the captain enters, there Naphtali stands :
A look of recognition, and both stretch forth their
hands.

Enhanced by a grateful heart, the soldier friendship
shows ;
Unto whom but this Hebrew lad is it his life he
owes ?

"I can ne'er express my thanks for your kindness
to my loved one."
"I am glad," exclaimed Harmeter, "something for
you to have done."

"But," said the Persian, "how can it be
So far from Babylon I you see ?"

"My little sister I came to seek," Naphtali said ;
"And to redeem her for a ransom, I hither have
been led."

"Think you, from my deliverer a ransom I would
take ?
Freely now I give her up for your own dear sake.

"A high price, indeed, would the sweet girl command
If I sold her as a slave, away from my own hand."

Naphtali's grateful thanks to Harmeter he then gave.
"No thanks, for what can equal the gift
Of a life that has been saved?"

On the following morn, Naphtali and his sister started away;
On the long journey to Babylon, they slowly travelled day by day.

The scrip that Rachel carried dropped low unto the ground,
And among the scattered contents much golden coin was found.

The kind Harmeter had remembered them with care:
It was his thoughtfulness, they knew,
Had placed the money there.

For little Rachel, Naphtali had been much concerned;
There was no way of going down the river,—
This much he had learned.

So he purchased two gentle mules for them to travel on,
And joined a caravan bound for Babylon.

Pausing now and then to rest as their weary way they keep,
Scattered here and there the white tents look like sheep.

Beside a cooling stream where the lofty palm-trees
rise
Is a place for rest and comfort under the desert skies.

Naphtali, seeing his sister's face beaming bright,
Said, "What art thou thinking of that makes thy
heart so light?"

"I was thinking of those sweet songs which David
sung;
In some fair spot like this, they must have to him
come."

"Or one far more beautiful," Naphtali said;
"I have heard good Ithamar speak of the deep
ravines
And grand hills where our forefathers were fed.
The fairest scenes soon weary one by their monotony
here,
Yet these endless plains seem to rest me
And make me think of eternity near."

"Naphtali, before my lameness came to me
I longed from bondage to be free;
I never thought so much of God and rest,
But only of fleeing to you, whom I loved best.
And now in his great wisdom he has sent you back
to me;
Through his love and mercy we cannot always see.

I know he leadeth me by pastures green;
This so often I have seen.
Surely goodness will follow me all my days,
And may I dwell in the house of the Lord always."

"My little Rachel has learned to trust her Father
As she could not once, I see.
Ah, Rachel, that last wish of thine, I hope will be,
To dwell in the house of the Lord forever, realized
by thee."

Thus it was that each the other's faith strengthened
day by day,
As they journeyed on their long and tedious way.

Naphtali pointed out the depredations the enemy had
done;
And little Rachel shuddered when she thought
Of the active part through which he too had come.

"The broken walls of Jerusalem I long to see
Built up again; oh, what a glorious day that will be!
I cannot help wishing that I may see
The fulfilment of the prophecy."

Little Rachel sighed as a beautiful gazelle bounded
past,
And said, "I long for the time when blind eyes
Shall be opened and deaf ears unstopped at last."

"*The lame man shall leap as an hart.*"

Naphtali was touched by the childlike faith
That in Rachel had a part;
But the great God was drawing her
To his tender and loving heart.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KING'S DECREE.

When to the nobleman's palace they were led,
Ishbak, the Jew, to Naphtali said,—

"Have you the great news about Daniel heard?
Among the Medes and Persians jealousy was stirred.

"'For thirty days no request to God or man
Might any bring,'—
Thus read their unchangeable law,—
'Save unto the king;'

"For into the lion's den they should be cast
Whosoever disobeyed this law that now was passed.

"But Daniel, the favorite, went openly to pray,
And low beside his window knelt he, three times a day.

"Troubled in his mind was Darius the king
When this sad news to him the messenger did bring.

"But the decree already had been passed,
And into the lion's den Daniel must be cast.

"All night long, while he his prayers to God did
bring,
The music that the people played failed to please the
king.

"Early in the morning the king hastened to the
lion's den,
To see if any deliverance God had brought to him.

"Oh, how delighted then to find that God had kept
him safe!
Of harm the lions did to him, found they not any
trace.

"Now so enraged with those wicked men was he
Who against Daniel had plotted and urged on this
strange decree,
"Into the lion's den then those wicked men he cast,
With their wives and children, to be devoured at
last.

"For no angel of the Lord was there to intercede,
And on them the hungry lions greedily did feed."

"But what effect," replied Naphtali,
"Had this deliverance on our king?"

"To all people and nations proclaimed he this,
That Daniel's God the one living and true God is.

"Also he decreed that in every part of his kingdom
Men should fear and tremble before this Daniel's friend,
Whose dominion and whose signs on earth shall have no end."

"Oh, Ishbak, what glorious news this is to hear!
The Lord of hosts a God of justice is, and one to fear."

In the nobleman's household Naphtali and Rachel
Had spent a pleasant year:
As months passed on in their quiet and pleasant home,
There was nothing more to fear.
Naphtali and Rachel among God's chosen few,
A "remnant," still to be numbered, was the Jew.

Adversity and prosperity alike had strengthened
Their well-grounded trust,
Since their residence in Babylon
News they had to confirm their faith
In this God so just.

They had heard the wonderful story of the book of Jeremiah,
That he had sent to the captive nations years ago,
How the great prince Seraiah had brought it to Babylon

And, after reading the prophecies concerning the
doomed city,
Into the Euphrates it did throw.

Signifying how great should one day be the fall
Of the mighty capital.

Yet ever from these terrible judgments,
As from the stagnant pool arises the lily white,
This captive nation hoped that redemption
Would one day come to them aright.

One day, in the market-place, a great
Concourse of people did Naphtali see;
Curious the cause to learn, he inquired
If Cyrus had issued a new decree.

"That he has," replied a stranger;
"But hark, can you not hear?"
The shrill trumpet again commanded silence,
And the startling words were near:

"Who is among you of all God's people,
Up to Jerusalem let him go."
Thus Cyrus, king of Persia,
Astonished the multitude below.

But in all the vast concourse, there was
Not a heart with deeper joy now filled

Than Naphtali's: he had so wonderfully
Seen the prophecies fulfilled.

His eagerness to tell Rachel the wonderful decree
Outstripped his fleet steps; but yonder Ishbak he
doth see.

Telling his glad news to another brought to him
relief,
But this proud Ishbak could not share in his belief.

Strange it was how this gloomy man
Would find flaws in everything.
"Out of love to Israel, do you suppose,
This did our king?"

Naphtali replied, "How could it otherwise have
been,
With the noble Daniel in court his influence to
lend?"

From the pressure of Ishbak's leaden words,
Naphtali's bright hopeful nature soon is stirred.

A more congenial friend in Rachel's sympathy he
finds,
Words more pleasing and suited to his mind.

"Why," exclaimed she, with her cheeks all aglow,
"I did not think of the blessing coming to us so."

"My heart yearns like a living coal up to Jerusalem
to go."
"And mine, too," replied Rachel; "but,
As I am a cripple, how can it be so?"

With tenderness replied Naphtali,
"You must not grieve;
My sister here in Babylon
I will never leave."

Just then a message from Shethar to him was
brought,
And Rachel was left to her own perplexing thought.

CHAPTER VII.

JOURNEYING TO JERUSALEM.

Onward pressed the Jewish band
From the banks of Chebais:
Forty-and-two thousand three hundred
And threescore souls were these.

Maids and servants besides seven thousand
Three hundred and thirty-seven,
Then two hundred singing-men and singing-women
For funeral-rites and marriage-feasts were given.

Horses, camels, and asses increased the caravan
And bore its treasure;
The priests, the Levites, and the singers waited
To consecrate these offerings with pleasure.

In Babylon, never had there a more joyful gathering been;
In all the great metropolis, more zealous advocates
The Jewish faith had never seen.

The vessels of God's house they had taken
From the heathen temple at Cyrus's command;

In all the long years of captivity
They had been guarded by God's own hand.

For his chosen people, his providential care
How could they doubt?
All things in readiness were for them
On the morrow to start out.

The veil of twilight was fast falling o'er the city;
Naphtali watched its palaces and temples
Till all was hid beneath the mantle of night in pity.

Of the fated city, Naphtali now was thinking,—
How, in the coming days, it should be levelled to the dust;
From the dreadful downfall he longed to save it,
But what could he do more than trust?

Many a heart beat in like emotion
That night for the beautiful city;
Who can say but, in answer to prayer,
Its destruction was delayed in pity?

With the first gleam of dawn the Israelites
Awoke, in line to form;
And, ere the scorching heat of the noonday sun,
Many miles on their way were gone.

Let us look over the familiar faces, and see
If, beside Naphtali's, the sunny face of Rachel there will be.

Among the many singers Naphtali is numbered
there,
And with good old Zilpah Rachel a place doth share.
Among the children of Azgad, Ishbak will be found
In the great concourse of people marching up to
Jerusalem's ground.

When the decree of Cyrus reached the nobleman's
ear,
Of Naphtali's going he could not bear to hear.
He had a sad and troubled heart
When, with his favorite, he found that he must part.

Now rich offerings Shethar for him proposed.
But the nobleman's gifts they would be;
And on God's altar *his all* he must lay, thought he.

Let us march onward and to the great company
cling,
Now with Zilpah and Rachel our first day's journey
bring.
I doubt whether in all that great caravan,
As their way they wend,
There were two happier souls than Zilpah and her
friend.

With growing interest Rachel listened to the mother
of Israel
While her good stories she would tell.

The thrilling strains of song that came
From the distant choir
Seemed like the chiming of bells,
And did her poetic mind inspire.

But good old Zilpah could nothing hear
Save the tramping of feet that were very near,
While she talked oft of her happy home
Where in her youthful days she loved to roam.

Telling them of the flocks she tended,
Of the beautiful olive-trees
Dotted all about her father's house
On the hill-side near were these.

"Oh, my child, I cannot tell you how dear
To my aged heart it seems,—
This home of my childhood, from which
I an exile long have been.

"Oh, could I but see those beautiful hills and dales
again!
But perhaps, like myself, not many of their charms
remain.

"There is naught in the land of exile
Could with those hills compare;
But 'tis seventy years since the destroyer came,—
Who can tell what changes may be there?

"If my eyes but behold Carmel and Lebanon again,
I shall feel that my journey has not been in vain.

"But I will weary you with my babblings of by-
gone years."
"Of your capture, can you not tell me,
From your home where you knew no fears?"

"Thinking of trials borne long ago
Brings to the heart new trust;
Tell you of that fearful night,
Yes, dear child, I must."

"I never thought," replied Rachel, "the memory
Of past troubles could ever joyous be."
"Profitable if not pleasant, they may surely prove,
you'll see.

"Before my story I begin,
That sweet psalm of David let me hear you sing."

"Most gladly I will: a new world it opened unto
me;
It is my favorite; I call it the golden key."

That sweet song now charmed another listener's
ear:
"Am I always to find you by that glorious chant,
sister dear?"

She watched Naphtali with sisterly love and pride,
The same thoughtful brother he was now ever near
her side.

There in the sultry noontide, they sought
The shade and cooling stream,
As they did when on their way to Babylon,
It to Rachel seemed.

And with grateful hearts recounted they
God's mercy to his chosen race.
"Is it not wonderful," said Rachel, "how
He cares for each and every one in his place?"

Zilpah quickly replied, "Great love and pity indeed
has he:
Let me tell you how graciously he has dealt with
me.

"It may strengthen, in the great God of Israel, your
trust;
My whole story rings out with thanksgiving
To him who I know is just.
'*He leadeth me beside the still waters.*'
The picture of my joyous childhood seems to be
mirrored there,
For my young life was filled with all things bright
and fair.
In the latter part of King Josiah's reign I was born,

When all the idols of his predecessors from the
temple had been torn,
And once more Judah had taken
The one true God to rule supreme
During the reign of Josiah our king."

"Your words remind me, good Zilpah,
Of Ithamar's glowing accounts of each happy year.
Talking of God's mercies while in King Josiah's
reign,
A bright light in his dim eye would appear.

"Even behind the dark cloud of captivity
The tender, pitying face of our Father shines;
He to anger slow, and plenteous in mercy is;
Not willingly doth he afflict any children of his.

"Would that Ithamar this glorious day had lived to
see!"
"But better far," replied Zilpah, "with God his
King to be.
'I am sick,' the inhabitants in that land shall never
say."

Followed now a long silence, for each
Was thinking of his loved ones
In that land so far away,—
So far, and yet so near that one little breath
Withdrawn might waft us there.

Sweet, sad thoughts of the better land
Bring our loved ones to us near.

"I had almost forgotten my story,
For in spirit I seemed thither to glide,
But I will continue if you are interested enough
To keep close by my side.

"My father was a zealous and devoted Jew,
And by birth 'twas my mother's religion too.

"But she was brought up in a family
Where the god of Baal was adored;
Through the influence of my father,
She learned to worship the one true Lord.

"Ofttimes ever afterwards, he would say,
More than her teacher learned she
The great God to worship and obey.

"No wonder I learned to worship God
In the atmosphere of this home, where I grew
In the daily observance of our beautiful religion that
I knew.

"The God of Israel I thought I loved
With my whole heart;
The trial of my faith was yet to come,
But with that thought I now must part.

"My mother by death from me soon was called
away:
When I was but twelve years old,
With me she could no longer stay.

"Her foster-parents, Hilkiah and Abi,
From Jerusalem did come;
Although worshippers of Baal,
They wished to take me to their home.

"A striking resemblance to my mother they did see.
Then they begged permission that they might adopt
me.

"So zealous in religion was I, for one of my years,
That, to temptation I might yield, my father had no
fears.
So with words of affection he bade me a kind fare-
well,
My native hills I left, in the city henceforth to dwell.

"To the beautiful city, Jerusalem, I went.
Only a short time had passed, when news to me was
sent
Of my father's death; but again I was
More bitter trials to know
That would make my heart o'erflow.
He had been struck by the falling of a forest-tree,
And not one parting word had he left for me.

"Those eight years that followed my thirteenth
summer, how very sad!
Yet outwardly I had all things to make my sad heart
glad.

"Everything they could, to make my sorrow less,
my foster-parents did.
Learning to love the display of the heathen temples,
there was no one to forbid.
My face from my father's God turned I then away,
And the unreal god of an evil imagination learned
I to obey."

Tears were now streaming down her withered,
wrinkled cheek;
But Rachel's heart was too full of sympathy to
speak.
Tenderly she stroked the white hair of her aged
friend
That now in bonds of love with her own heart did
blend.

Naphtali's eyes wandered from the shining desert
To the soft clouds floating overhead;
He thought how silently they had risen
From their gloomy bed.

He marked how, o'er rock and bank,
Fell the little stream that whitened at his feet,

And how the very weeds rivalled the freshness
Of the stately palms complete.

The beauty of penitential grief came to his mind
with striking force;
From the morass, the fresh cloud with the living
green
Seemed to bear a new impress of the great God in
its course.

Perceiving that an effort to relate her story had
become,
They begged her the rest of her narrative to postpone.

Naphtali to his companion singers then returned,
Impatient he, at even necessary delay while they
sojourned.

But scarcely had they concluded their last song
When from Zerubbabel came the order to march on.

Joyfully Naphtali hastened to lend
Old Zilpah and Rachel aid;
But he would not find the little white tent, he was
afraid.

Hurrying to a hillock of hardened sand close by,
Not a single tent remained, as o'er the oasis Naphtali
cast his eye.

In much anxiety with the moving caravan travelled
he along;
"Would he once again find Rachel,"
He wondered, "by that psalm?"

Ah! there was Ishbak, who at once his anxiety
relieved,—
Rachel and Zilpah had kind attention at his hand
received.

While exchanging their mutual inquiries,
Ishbak unnoticed into the crowd was gone,
And they saw him not again for many days to come.

Nothing from a prosperous journey that day them
did keep,
And at nightfall they rested under his eye
Who neither slumber knows nor sleep.

The following day, as their journey they still pursue,
Rachel was delighted at Zilpah's proposal her story
to renew.

"*He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of
righteousness for his name's sake.*"

"I had not begun, my dear young friends,
To relate the way the Good Shepherd 'restored my
soul.'

Tenderly he sought his wandering sheep,
And through love led me back to the fold.

"During the wicked Jehoiakim's reign,
The great Nebuchadnezzar first up to Jerusalem came.

"At that time only a few of our nation
Were carried away from their native land,
But from the first attack of that mighty king,
The whole country seemed a child's toy in his hand.

"In the eighth year of Jehoiakim's reign
The Moabites and Syrians in bands to Jerusalem
came,
And the Ammonites were in league with
The Babylonian king the same.

"Truly we soon realized the threatenings
Of an offended God were just,
And in the future more terrible calamities
Receive from the vial of his wrath we must.

"The aged Hilkiah was but one among
The many who were slain,
And poor old Abi not alone in her
Lamentations for her husband did complain.

"About one-and-twenty was I then,
And very vain indeed

Of my long, black, glossy hair;
Bright eyes too I had, and a beautiful complexion
fair.

"Dazzled then I was with a rich Ammorite
Who was twice my years;
A high position offering me,
My hand without my heart I gave,
Thinking not of fears.

"No wonder that my married life
A source of misery proved to be:
From the commandments I had wandered,
And the God of Israel I did not see.

"Beside the sin of intermarriage with a heathen,
I had married without love;
Baal I worshipped outwardly, but an idol
I made of self, for entirely I had forgotten
The great God above.

"A little son was then given unto me:
I had a priceless treasure to worship now, you see;
But Jehovah's words still remained the same,—
'*No other God before me ever shalt thou name.*'

"The truth of his commandments
I know I learned at last,
But not before my heart through sorer trials had
passed.

"Of the heathen deity Moloch,
No doubt you both have heard;
A great sacrifice demands he
When his anger e'er is stirred."

"Oh, Zilpah, in what manner did they worship his great name?"
"To mention it, makes me shudder, but the bitter trial came.

"By the Ammorites he was worshipped,—
This heathen god all made of brass;
There was the head of a calf on the great hollow image,
In which a fire was kindled and the victim thrown,—alas!
No dumb brute will the helpless victim be,
But a living human being, as you soon shall see."

"Oh, Zilpah, Zilpah!" Rachel exclaimed,
As if the fearful sight she saw;
"In that manner how could they demand
One to worship, or our God suffer such a law?"

Zilpah replied, bitterly weeping,—
"Those cruel priests, I believe, enjoy the sight;
But the sacrifice I was demanded to make
I have not shown you yet aright.

"My husband compelled me this offering to bring,
Saying he had grievously offended Moloch the king.

"He the oracle consulted, and what think
You he did demand?
My little son—my own heart's treasure—
Was called for at his hand.

"I begged my husband that my life
A sacrifice might be made;
But nothing save the sinless life of a little child
On the altar could be laid."

"His father," replied Rachel, "was he not loath
This cruel sacrifice to see?"
"God forbid that I should judge him now,
But his words were cold and unfeeling then to me.

"My little son away from me they took;
With all a mother's love I begged to keep him till
the fatal hour;
But with my earnest entreaties nothing could I do,
For all things now lay in the heathen power.

"I thought over, on my sleepless couch that night,
Every imaginable place where they might have him
concealed;
To my long-forsaken God, entreating cries for help
I sent,
That the place to me might be revealed.

"And at midnight I arose to seek the hiding-place
of my boy,
Trusting to an offended God that I
Might find my heart's delight and joy.

"While wandering about the priest's dwelling
The suppressed cry of a child I heard;
I crouched close down beside the wall
Waiting for the morning,
All the mother-love in my heart now stirred.

"If nothing more I could do, with him
I was resolved to perish;
I could not see him given as a sacrifice,—
My loved one I so cherished.

"But the early dawn revealed a new and unexpected
light to me:
Nebuchadnezzar had come again,
And the astonished people were in a besieged city
now, you see.

"The wicked and weak king of Judah
An almost instant surrender made;
And before nightfall my darling
Once more in my arms was laid.

"Into the priest's dwelling a band of soldiery forced
their way,
While I in my place of concealment there lay.

"Forgetful of everything except the rescue of my
darling boy
(Unguarded he had been),
I pressed in and bore him away in triumphant joy.

"But whither for safety should I now go?
My first thought was to the house of Abi;
A friend she would be, I know.

"But turning aside from the riotous troops
To a more unfrequented part of the city,
I caught site of a Levite's house,
Wherein I found both love and pity.

"My little one I resolved to consecrate that day,
Commending him to Israel's God,—
And then I must haste away.

"With my precious child I now must part,—
But warmth and joy suddenly filled my heart.

"When in the good man's arms I him had placed,
Safer now, I thought, he is, than in a mother's strong
embrace.

"Still fearing my husband and the priest of Moloch
Were in pursuit of me,
A hurried farewell and kiss I gave him—
A place of concealment for myself to see.

"Ere nightfall I was borne a captive far away,
And of my little boy's fate I have not heard since
that weary day.

"With the many thousands of people
Whom Nebuchadnezzar up to Babylon then did take,
My lot it was to meet also such a bitter fate.

"For my boy I have deeply yearned
All these seventy years,
Hoping word from him to learn
That would quiet my fears.
But I gave him up that day to the Mighty One,
Saying, 'Father unto thee I commend my son.'

"All these seventy years of my exile
Would an unprofitable story make,
But filled with mercy it would be
From the beginning to the end of my sad fate."

As Zilpah spoke, Rachel looked up through blinding
tears;
A halo of light around her friend now appears.
Deeply affected had both Naphtali and Rachel been,
And ever after unto them a sacred charge she seemed.

Four months through deserts, the caravan
We may not follow day by day,
But unmolested by savage foes
God's protecting arm seemed around their way.

Naphtali's hopeful nature constant sunshine shed
around,
Those in his companionship pleasure ever found.
In the whole company, the progress of each day's
journey
Marked no one more than he;
At last, when his feet rested upon the
Sacred land, rejoiced he seemed to be.

To the land of the exiled they were hastening fast;
Fresh in his well-stored mind were the
Historic events of the past.

Jordan's blue waves still seemed waiting for
The ark-bearing priest, as they flowed on the sand;
And Israel, with its wonderful history, its mighty
Hills and deep ravines, was no less grand.

For the first time they did Naphtali's thoughts
beguile;
Holy seemed the ground he trod, fairer
Seemed the flowers than those in the land of his exile.

Not altogether because he looked upon it with the
eye of a zealous Jew,
Still bearing marks of its ruthless foes,
Yet on every side it revealed its natural beauty fine
and true.

Babylon, with all its grand works of art,
Could not compare with the beauty of Palestine;
Through tear-dimmed eyes old Zilpah looked upon
That dear familiar scene.

Could those uncultivated wastes,
Those barren slopes, be indeed the land
Where the vine and olive grew,
The land that flowed with milk and honey?
Yet she knew this to be true.

From her wrinkled face the sweet, patient
Smile was almost gone,
But by and by the light to her countenance
Again did come.

Ay, the smiles of God again rested upon Judea,
And, seen through that glorious light,
Her native land began to grow more beautiful and bright.

The weary journey will not much longer last;
The hills that have hidden Jerusalem from them
Now will soon be passed.

The oft-repeated vision of the holy city
A glad reality is soon to be now;

Fast sinking is the sun behind those sentinels in the
west,
And Naphtali stands with thoughtful brow.

He is thinking of the evening when he trod
On the plains of Shinar,
Watching for the last time the palaces
Of Babylon from afar.

How widely distinct had Babylon and Jerusalem
been,
Yet closely linked together in the hearts of those
captive Jews they seem.

In spirit they had lived in one,
And there had longed to be,
While their bodies for seventy years
Had lain in captivity.

As Naphtali watched the darkening hills of Jeru-
salem,
Thinking of the longed-for scene,
He resolved to wipe out the whole picture,
Lest on the morrow it might fall short of his ideal
dream.

In his musing so deeply absorbed was he,
That a dark figure flitting about his tent he did not
see.

No other than Ishbak the unexpected visitor to him proved.
"Naphtali, your gaze from yonder hills
For a long time you have not moved.
What will you do when you are really within the city's street,
Whither you have hastened with glad and willing feet?"

"I will labor with my whole strength
Its ruined temple to restore;
The very thought fills my heart with joy;
What could we ask for more?"

"I am thinking, for my part, it will no light labor be."
"But deep down in your heart, Ishbak,
In this work a labor of love I think you see."

"To be sure, my part of the toil I will gladly bear;
But, Naphtali, I cannot see why you left
Your post of honor, with these pilgrims your lot to share."

"I know in Babylon the lines had fallen
In pleasant places unto me,
But what was all that compared with the joy
Of Zion now to see?

"Oh, Ishbak, wild and visionary you may me call,
But happiness o'er my whole life now seems to
fall."

"I envy you your hopeful nature,"
Replied Ishbak, with a sigh.
"The same right to these glorious expectations
You have, my friend, as I.

"What the prophets tell us concerning Messiah,
Can you not believe?
Their glowing words sufficient are
The darkest midnight to relieve.

"We should not yield to gloomy doubts and fears."
"But the dark side, Naphtali, I have looked on all
these years."

"The rich promises show us that we need not fear;
A strong city have we in God's salvation,
With walls and bulwarks near.

"'Open, ye gates, that the righteous who keep
The truth may enter in;'
Jehovah's everlasting strength alone
Can deliver us from sin.

"Though our sins to us may as scarlet seem,
Messiah through his blood will our souls redeem.

"These charming promises, remember, have been
given unto us;
Are they not enough to make one happy
And in God to put his trust?"

"But somehow, Naphtali, I cannot think
Those comforting words are meant for me,
Such a great sinner I have been,
Wicked and rebellious too, you see.

"Perhaps some time I may be better fitted
God's forgiveness to ask."
"No more power have we than the leopard
His spots to change, for such a task.

"God does not require of us such an impossible
thing;
But 'unto me,' he says, 'my son, thy poor heart
bring.'"

"Did not Job say, 'How can God a justifier be and
just?'
This free forgiveness I cannot see, in which you put
your trust."

"We cannot see how food to bone and muscle giveth
strength,
Nor how the soil such varied plants putteth forth at
length.

"Again, I think God has not left us in the dark
About this great salvation which he has begun;
The daily sacrifices and the scape-goat are
But types of the Saviour yet to come."

"*Upon him is laid the iniquity of us all.*"

"But it is almost night, and we must our conversation cease;
May the God of all comfort keep your heart in perfect peace."

Early next morning, as the caravan
Was starting on its journey for the day,
"One word may I have with you?"
Exclaimed Ishbak, in a quite excited way.

"Thrice that number," quickly answered
Naphtali to his friend.
"Then I will begin my story
While your attention to me you lend.

"The tents are as much alike as lentil-seeds, you know;
Last night, in searching for ours,
Farther from it I seemed to go.

"At last I became discouraged, and lay down
Outside a tent in the outer row;

Your conversation floated through my brain,
Things came to me that in my boyhood I did know.
All my disobedience that well-nigh broke my father's heart,
Even the blasphemous words in which I then took part.

"With all a father's tender love he strove to draw
My heart to Israel's God:
Like a picture all these things, revolving, were
Showing me the sinful ways I've trod.

"I saw my dying mother, and how from
Bondage I endeavored to escape;
I lost the only bright spot in my life
The night I left my father's home quite late.

"To the great city of Babylon I know not how I found my way,
But in my bewildered joy I walked there one dusty summer day.

"My speech and countenance soon betrayed me as a Jew;
I had wandered far from home,—
Wandered into bondage new.

"Before night, I was borne to the market-place
And to the father of young Shethar was sold,
The dull routine of a slave's life to you need not be told.

"But to the strangest part of my story
(New life within me it stirred):
My father's voice, I thought, in the tent
Close by I heard.

"In earnest voice and pleading he prayed
For his wayward son,
Little knowing then that his prayer
Was answered ere done.

"These fourteen years I oft have yearned
To find my parent dear,
And my heart leaped with a sudden joy
When I found that he was near.

"For my father's voice I had not forgotten,
Although from him so far away;
In every pause of his prayer I seemed to hear
The verse of the song you sung that day:
'*Like as a father pitieth his children*
So the Lord pitieth them that fear him.'

"Oh, how impatiently I waited for the break of day;
But somehow, Naphtali, the dawn
Has taken my courage all away.
In feeble health my father is, I learn;
Do you think I had better to him now return?"

Naphtali looked off thoughtfully to the hill,
Offering up a prayer that he might know God's will.

"Fourteen long years since parted you've been;
Then changed very much, to him you may seem;
The best thing, I think, for you now would be
To go to your father as a stranger, you see;
And you may be sure he will talk of his son,
And then by degrees the acquaintance will come."

With pleasure Naphtali's counsel Ishbak heard,
While he hastened away with the speed of a bird.
God wonderfully leads us in a way we have not known,
And to Ishbak great mercy he had shown.

"I am glad he has revealed his past life unto me;
More interested in him I now henceforth shall be.
Would I had known more of him when
We together in servitude did go;
How little the heart-history of our daily friends we know?"

So soliloquized Naphtali; both Zilpah
And Ishbak had undergone a transformation, as it were.
Thinking of the story of Zilpah
Reminded him of his little charge,
But yonder in the distance now he sees her.

A very happy journey now before them was laid,
Albeit the numerous hills it a little irksome made.

Reached at last the summit of Jerusalem is,
And there before them the desolate city lies.
Who can describe the feelings that thrilled their hearts
When they gazed upon it in glad surprise?

Here lay the city of Jerusalem at Naphtali's very feet,
So like and yet unlike what his imagination pictured,
Yet it made his joy complete.

Seventy years, as God had prophesied,
Keeping Sabbath it had been,
And the mantle of its rest all about it still folded seemed.

The gentle rippling of the brook Kedron
Might there be heard,
Mingling with the cry of a solitary bird.

Naught but its soft, low dirge
Broke the silence of the scene;
And Mount Moriah, with its ruined temple,
Across the valley rose quite plain.

Looking around in fancy, he a beautiful structure saw
Rising from beneath the gray ruins,
And it filled his heart with awe.

With just a dimple between,
The longer ridge of Zion rose;
And far to the southwest, the course
Of Hinnom's gloomy valley closed.

But the fig and olive with the rich
Green foliage of the vine
Gave a strange freshness to the desolate scene,
A token, also, of God's remembrance in his mercy
kind.

"*The joy of the whole earth!*" exclaimed Naphtali.
To see it rebuilt was his strongest desire,—
Jerusalem, with its natural features, that
Neither time nor sacrilegious hands can mar.

Most wistfully Zilpah gazed upon the
Well-remembered scenes, in tears;
Well-nigh hidden to her was the glorious future
In the mist of by-gone years.

"Why, Rachel," exclaimed Naphtali, as he
Noticed the shadow that not even her smile
Of welcome drove away,
"What has banished the brightness of my sunbeam
this glad day?"

"Oh, Naphtali, I know it is very wrong of me,
But I am disappointed, as you see."

"You expect too much outward loveliness, I fear.
I think, when we look around these hills
And vales, we'll find much to admire, my dear.

"Solomon's temple,—oh, Rachel, think
Of the glad feast-days celebrated there,
The songs of triumph that have echoed
From hill to hill, and solemn prayer.

"There God revealed his glory in the Holy of Holies,
There selected his dwelling-place;
O Jerusalem, thou hast been the perfection
Of loveliness and grace.

"This privilege may God grant to his
Repenting children,
Of restoring it again to its matchless splendor,
To the glory and honor of his name."

Naphtali's ardent soul in every feature seemed to shine.
Little Rachel was sorry for her weak
And childish expression and disappointed mind.

"From my eyes, Naphtali, you have taken
The blindness, and relieved me of a load;
I now see Jerusalem as it really is,—
The city of God's abode."

"But look, Rachel, is not that Ishbak
Who is talking so earnestly to that old man yonder?"
"Yes, Naphtali, and he is kissing the old man's
hand
As if receiving a patriarchal blessing;
What does it mean, I wonder?"

"Listen, and a beautiful tale I will tell to you."
And Naphtali related to Rachel the story
Of Ishbak, while the picture before them
Proved his story true.

CHAPTER VIII.

REJOICINGS.

THE journey was ended, the holy city
Once more was trodden by pious feet.
First the house of God the great company
Sought, their liberal offering to make meet.

Then did the Levites, the singers, the Nethinims,
And the great company of no less faithful Jews,
Seek to make their home in the land of their fathers;
And a place with Naphtali did good old Zilpah choose.

Naphtali sought a place in sight of the temple,
Thinking a pleasant home to find,
For as a singer he would often be away
A whole week at a time.

He had hoped that Ishbak and his kindred
Would settle near;
But since the confusion of their last day's journey
From him they could not hear.

So in their lowly home the three together settled
there;
But Zilpah was too old for much save quietude and
prayer.

Her manner, very subdued had become at last,
Till one day Rachel asked her why of late
She talked so little of the past?

"I have been thinking, Rachel, that I must
Take heed to the time God has left to me;
Yet not much can I do but pray for the
Prosperity of Israel you see.

"The past in God's keeping is, and I look
Forward now to a fairer city than Jerusalem,
Where my loved ones dwell."
"Oh, Zilpah, I cannot bear to hear you such things
tell."

Not many weeks had elapsed after their arrival,
Till the beginning of the seventh month—
The month of feasts—came on;
Then, as one man, came they up to Jerusalem,

To consecrate to the God of Israel an altar
Upon which burnt-offerings must be laid,
To show the people a symbol of their religion
And to remind their own hearts of the law
That God for Moses made.

A most impressive month it was to the returned
Israelites,
And it served their zealous hearts in closer
Bonds of love to God and one another to unite.

Around their humble altar the worshippers
Gathered with upturned face,
Although no glittering temple there
The scene did grace.

No Holy of Holies, no Urim and Thummim, revealed God's will;
But the glory of the great Jehovah with love their
hearts did fill.

To Zilpah and Rachel all these ceremonies
Of exceeding interest were;
To Zilpah, especially, they past memories
In her heart did stir.

When back again to their home they went,
It seemed indeed that her strength was almost spent.
Rachel could not help seeing how heavily
Upon her fell the burden of her years;
Perhaps the silver cord might soon be loosened,
But this filled her heart with fears.

So she put the thought from her far away,
Living over again the festival days in glee,

For in the land of bondage these days
Were named in secrecy.

The sacrificial offering, the clarion notes
Of the trumpets, and the clouds of incense
Were both rich and rare,
Far beyond the gaudy display of the heathen
Festivals, though they magnificent were.

"Oh, Naphtali, if every day of the year they could
but last,
How heaven-like earth would be, as here our time
we passed."

"But, Rachel, do we not have burnt-offerings every
day?
These a reminder should be to bring us on our
heavenly way."

Glorious and grand days had this seventh month
To the young singer brought,
In his own appointed way to worship
The God of Israel, in both deed and thought.

The very songs that King David sung
On Zion's hill (where Christ's holy footsteps trod),
In this place it was his earthly hope to dwell and
worship God.

Since the decree of Cyrus scarcely a twelvemonth
now had passed;
All ready they were to begin the foundation-stone at
last.

A great gathering of the people up to Jerusalem came,
To set forward the work of the Lord's house in his
name.

Among the vast assembly, Rachel detected
Ishbak's well-remembered face;
Some distance from them was he,
With the gray-haired man near to his embrace.

Hark! loudly the trumpets are sounding,
And to Zilpah Rachel tightly clings
Lest she should lose her in the throng.
How sweetly the singers their cymbals touch,
And chorus after chorus arises their thanksgiving
song!

"*Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good, for
his mercy endureth forever towards Israel, his
people.*"

The shouts of the people, too, a great way off might
be heard;
The builders of the temple the foundation-stone had
laid,
While the voices of the multitude were stirred.

The Levites and priests, who were ancient men,
Were thinking of the first grand temple;
What a contrast this to the brilliant sight of by-gone years!
These gray-haired men looked now with eyes bedimmed with tears.

While shouts of joy from the youthful rise,
For their hearts were filled with glad surprise.

Scarcely could Zilpah and Rachel distinguish
These shouts of joy from lamentations near,
And the faces all about them a strange
Contradiction to one another did appear.

But the faces on the left that greeted her
With joy were beaming
As Ishbak grasped her hand:
"Alone how did you venture in this crowded
Assembly to stand?"

Rachel eagerly replied, "Naphtali helped us here,
And to the crowd we have not as yet come near.
Has it not for our people been a glad and happy day?
But what means all this crying about us, pray?"

"They are brooding," replied Ishbak, "over the remembered past;
Yet I think they do wrong in throwing a chill
Over the rejoicing ones at last."

"It makes me feel like crying," answered she,
"When other people in tears I see.
But I am glad, Ishbak, to see your face so bright."

"Perhaps, little Rachel, it has caught some
Of your glad sunshine and light.
But here my father is, him I want your
Good old friend to see."
"How often," replied Rachel, "have I wished that
it might be."

So, a few moments later, when Naphtali hurried in,
He found them quietly conversing as friend with
friend.
He was very glad Ishbak again to meet,
And his father with kindness he did also greet.

Ishbak was greatly delighted to see Naphtali, his
friend;
And when the great company dispersed,
The rest of the day together they did spend.

Naphtali prevailed also upon Amram,
The father of Ishbak, the rest of his family to bring;
Never before so many bright faces
Around their frugal table had Rachel seen.

For the first time in her life
She felt ashamed of their homely fare;

But they the choicest free-will offering
That very morning for the Lord did spare.

However, a most happy gathering
It was in their humble home;
Zilpah and Amram found much converse
About the past and time to come.

Zilpah's added score of years its heavier burden
Had laid on heart and brow;
Treading, they both were, down the slope of years,
But the twentieth mile-stone or so more
A short space seemeth to them now.

Naphtali and Ishbak to each other
Had many things to say,
And arm in arm on the housetop
Walked they in the cool of the day.

"Naphtali, as you said, my father
Soon began to talk of his erring son;
Not long was it before our acquaintance then
begun.
But, oh, the parental blessing
That was showered upon me!
By this unmerited earthly love
Comprehended I the heavenly, you see."

"And you have found your heavenly Father's tender
care?"
In a very low and quiet tone Ishbak answered, "His
love I share.

"Yes, God has touched my soul with
His great love and filled it with his light;
That dark cloud you yonder see
Needs but one touch of the setting sun
To make it alive and bright."

"Oh, Ishbak," exclaimed Naphtali, "I am so glad
These words to hear you speak!"
Just then, from below, Rachel's voice called,
And they hastened to obey the summons
Of the dear voice sweet.

To the olive-grove on the hill-side
A walk had been proposed;
And soon the whole company
Were enjoying the shady groves.

Ishbak's young sisters enlivened them
With their sprightly talk and song;
But the twilight deepened, and
They had to part ere long.

CHAPTER IX.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

Ishbak and his kindred the following day
Their homeward way pursued;
But his home in Jerusalem he intended to make
As soon as the building of the temple was renewed.

When Naphtali his intentions heard,
He urged him to his household to come;
Very glad Ishbak was, and willingly
Accepted the offer of such a home.

Rachel was lonely after enjoying such rare pleasure,
For scarcely had she e'er done so before;
And the departure of Ishbak's merry sisters
Seemed to have closed the magic door.

In her childhood, almost isolated she had been,
But she had promised some time to visit them in
their home;
So she cheerfully resumed her work
Until that time should come.
Daily more saint-like in spirit the aged Zilpah grew;
She was ripening for that "far-off land," they knew.

Often in walks their time they spent;
Then Zilpah would point out many ruined buildings,
And her knowledge of the past
A charm to her stories lent.

With tear-dimmed eyes, one day her discourse
To the spot of the Levite's house inclined.
A question Rachel wished to ask
That had long been in her mind:
"Do you not think that we might learn something
Of the fate of your little son, even now?"

"'Tis the one thought that is constantly in my mind,"
Replied she with thoughtful brow.

"But I forgot to tell the priest my little one's name,
In my haste that day;
Who of my nameless child could tell,
When from me he has been so long away?

"I can only hope now, in the 'far-off land,'
Again to see my darling boy;
My prayer is, that God will unite us
In that land of joy."

Zilpah's resignation seemed too beautiful to mar;
But still Rachel hoped that in time to come
She somewhere in this life would find her long-lost
son.

The finding of Ishbak's father had greatly increased
her hope;
But the days came and went and Zilpah
Weaker grew, till Rachel began to fear
Those were prophetic words she spoke.

And then to her mind sad forebodings came:
The thought of living without old Zilpah
Always gave her pain.
But selfish thoughts were these, and
To check them she strove always;
Never was there a more devoted nurse,
Through all those weary days.

Just about that time hinderances
To the great rebuilding came:
The people of the country their services offered,
Saying, "We seek to worship in your God's name."

But Jeshua and Zerubbabel their motives understood,
And replied, "Unto the Lord our God
His house we'll build,
As Cyrus, king of Persia, commanded that we
should."

The people of the country were greatly troubled at
this news,
And began to annoy the builders in whatever way
they choose.

But they dared not openly do much,
Because they knew their work was supported by the king;
Yet in an underhanded way, great mischief to this people did they bring.

Even Naphtali's bright spirits
For a time much clouded were,
And Ishbak strove rash thoughts to keep back
When he found these obstacles
Would the work deter.

Meanwhile, the shadow daily lifted in Naphtali's home,
For returning health to the failing Zilpah seemed to come.
A visit to Ramah, Naphtali thought,
Her health would now restore;
Anxious to have her well again,
He urged her o'er and o'er.
So Zilpah and Rachel set out upon their way;
Ishbak accompanied them, though he did not mean to stay.

The little town of Ramah six miles north of Jerusalem lay;
As they journeyed, many historic events
Did they recall that day.

Here the great prophet Samuel his
Favorite residence had made,
An altar builded to the Lord, and here
In the fulness of his years to rest was laid.

From Ramah, a little way out, was buried
The beautiful wife of Jacob, whose sweet name
Little Rachel bore;
Well remembered Zilpah, that upon this
Eminence, under the Babylonian captain,
The Jews had assembled years before.

Her captivity had begun earlier; but oft
She had heard these captives tell
How they had viewed Jerusalem from this hill
As they bade it a long and sorrowful farewell.

Zilpah had of late learned all painful
Reminiscences to dispel,
And on the present sunshine and future
Happiness to dwell.

She spoke thus of the beautiful scenes around,
On every side before them stretched
A rich expanse of ground.

Above Olivet the morning sun was climbing fair,
And Jerusalem, half in shadow, half in
Sunshine, lay, an emblem of its true condition, there.

Far to the north and west the faint blue hills,
Of Carmel and Lebanon's beauty told;
With delight even Zilpah's dim eyes the
Rich prospect did behold.

Soon to the house of Amram they were brought,
And hearty greetings for a time absorbed all other thought.

Among those good people we will leave them now,
And back to Jerusalem with Ishbak alone will go.

The sunshine seemed dim without little Rachel's smile,
And the singing of the birds not so merry all the while.
From his mule twice he sprang to gather flowers rare,
Only to throw them away again as Rachel was not there.

By their desolate home in the city he was glad to pass,
And hastened to the temple to renew his daily task.

About a week afterwards a little incident occurred,
Trifling in itself, but of its bearing more will soon be heard.

A most discouraging day to the builders it had been;
Naphtali, with many others, the like had never seen.

With reluctance they laid aside their tools early in the day
And eagerly hastened on their homeward way.

They stopped to rest by the road-side near a well.
Soon a beautiful girl came there her pitcher to fill.
A sudden blush suffused her fair cheek,
As with courteous salutation they the beauty did greet.

While stooping to fill the pitcher, her long black hair
Fell like a dusky veil o'er her lovely face so fair.
And shyly out of the meshes peeped her eyes so bright,
They like twin stars seemed in the firmament of night.

Naphtali, noticing that with difficulty from the well
She the water drew and her pitcher filled,
Sprang quickly forward and offered to give
His help to her and her task relieve.

She thanked him with a bright and happy smile,
Accepting his kind offer all the while.
Scarcely had she the pitcher to him given,
When he dropped it, and into pieces it was riven.

She assured him no great harm had been done;
But he kindly offered to replace it by another one.

Naphtali had already noticed the unique design,
And wondered if another such he could easily find.

Her merry tones brought his self-possession back
again,
And he begged permission to fill another to the brim.
I will prove you, then, she right merrily said,
And to her father's house straightway them she led.

He was inclined to draw back when
He saw the home of a well-known enemy of the
Jews;
But courtesy and his pleasing companion
Checked the impulse, and he could not
Find it in his heart to refuse.

Her womanly dignity and childlike freedom seemed
to him
Over her whole deportment charms to lend.
The second pitcher was procured and filled with care,
While the light-hearted maiden gayly teased him
there.
He felt glad the valuable jar was to be replaced,
As he bade her good-by in all her winning grace.

With a dark frown upon his brow,
Ishbak to Naphtali said,
"I wonder much to see you encourage this gay
young maid."

Naphtali his old friend too well knew,
Further conversation on the subject to pursue.

Naphtali a substitute for the broken jar had found,
Before another month had passed around.
Meanwhile, the young Athaliah he had seen most
every day,
Either at the well or on the narrow winding path-
way.

Ere the replacement of the broken jar,
Their friendship had ripened fast;
Naphtali met with cordial greetings from her parents,
And by ties of true affection they seemed bound at
last.

Ishbak and Naphtali, returning from their work one
day,
A courier met with a message on the way:
From their friends at Ramah it was,
With an immediate request to hasten there.
With anxious forebodings and mingled curiosity,
For their journey they did prepare.

As they approached the dwelling,
Merry songs of minstrels fell upon their ear;
This increased their curiosity, but
Silenced all their fear.

"What can it all mean?" exclaimed Naphtali,
When to the rejoicing they drew near;
But soon the cause dropped from little Rachel's lips
As with a smiling face she did appear.

"Oh, Ishbak and Naphtali, glad news have I
To tell you, now you've come:
Good old Zilpah at last has found her long-lost son."

No further invitation needed they,
But, following Rachel, they soon were
In the midst of the happy gathering there.

There the good old mother sat with a
Smile upon her face,
While Amram with his youthful wife
And daughters the room did grace.

Amram, arising, drew Ishbak and Naphtali
To Zilpah's side, and said,
"Behold my mother, that from the fiery arms
Of Moloch caused me to be led.

"The fulfilment of God's promises
After many days has come;
He has led us down these threescore years
To the happy meeting in this home."

Naphtali, as his eye rested upon the touching scene,
Thought of the many years that had intervened.

He rejoiced in his heart the agéd mother
And son thus to behold;
But fast waning the evening was,
And the story not half told.

Amram and Zilpah seemed to have been
Recounting their past lives one day,
And the happy meeting came to them in this way:

Amram, pointing to an eminence, said,
"Very dear to me is yonder place,
Because from that spot we bade Jerusalem farewell,
Thousands together of our exile race.

"A mere boy I was then, but keenly this parting was
felt by me,
All the more because so utterly alone I was, you see.
The good Levite who to me father and mother both
had been,
Before my very eyes the preceding night was slain.

"I was surprised at Zilpah's countenance
When I had uttered these words:
On her whole face new joy seemed now to be stirred.

"'Levites your foster-parents?' she eagerly replied;
'And of the knowledge of your parents
Were you then denied?'

"The whole story then to her I did relate,
All my mother's self-sacrificing love
For my sad fate.

"The remainder of my story you can guess,
For I am done;
The scar upon my arm confirms
The story of her son.

"Thus, by an unnatural father, I had branded been;
My praise to God goes forth, for his graciousness
we've seen."

When at last his brief recital had been told,
The rest of the evening was spent in merry-making
By both young and old.

Ishbak and Naphtali to Jerusalem went next day,
Urging little Rachel to accompany them on their
way.

Henceforward Zilpah's home with her son would
be,—
With the son she had so long wished to see.
Rachel bade Zilpah a most reluctant good-by;
To go home without her she felt that she must try.

Her visit to Ramah enjoyable had been,
But she was glad to be with Naphtali in her home
again.

Indeed, a *ray* of light seemed now to shine within;
So affirmed Ishbak, since Rachel had with them
been.

Alas! that aught should mar the peace
Of their quiet home!
But hovering near dark shadows were;
Sorrow soon would come.

Naphtali for a few days almost had forgotten
Athaliah's bewitching face;
He knew to marry her would violate
One of the strictest laws of his race.

So the growing passion he daily strove to overcome;
At the well he would not meet her, neither see her
in her home.

Now every day Naphtali desired Rachel to fill the
jar,
And she to Ishbak and Naphtali carried it quite far.

She sometimes wondered they did not choose
The shady nook beside the well,
But in her mind, why it was, she could not tell.

Nor did Ishbak question why so changed
Towards Athaliah he was,
But thought within himself he must surely have a
a cause.

To avoid the wicked eyes of Athaliah glad was
he,—
For to Ishbak such they always seemed to be.

But the young damsel concerning her lover's
Absence could not rest;
No longer her grief and sorrow
She could hide within her breast.

She, at last, her artful mother a confidante
Of her secret made,
Thinking she could aid her in her trouble
Or some plans might be laid.

Rachel in her walk one day stopped to rest by the
way-side well:
Who of that fatal moment the consequence could
tell?

Sitting there, absorbed in Zilpah's new-found joy, she
sees
A haggard-looking woman sink exhausted
'Neath the tall palm-trees.

She seemed not different from the blooming Athaliah,
Whom Rachel had often met;
For something about her countenance there was
She could not easily forget.

Rachel's water-jar was standing close by;
To quench her burning thirst the woman
Asked permission it to fill, when she came nigh.

Rachel was always glad to favor any one,
So she instantly offered the weary woman some.

With many thanks the woman filled the jar
And a draught did drink,
Then refilled it and handed it to Rachel,
Who took it and no harm did think.

The whole incident, to a passer-by, trivial might have been,
And the consequences none could have foreseen.

A few brief remarks passed between the two,
Then Rachel with her pitcher did her homeward way pursue.

Still the woman lingered there after their short talk;
Reaching home, from the jar Rachel took a cooling draught.

But she perceived the water had a strange, undefinable taste;
Not knowing the cause of this, she emptied the pitcher in haste.

She was thinking of the good Zilpah,
Who had been with her so much in the past;
So she busied herself with her household cares,
Hoping to forget her loneliness at last.

As the afternoon began to wane,
A strange feeling o'er her came,
And a heavy stupor followed the cruel pain.

The young men from their labor now returned,
And, when they opened wide the door,
They found little Rachel lying unconscious upon the floor.

What it all did mean they could not tell,
But they hastened to give her restoratives to make her well.

By-and-by signs of animation to her came,
And Naphtali, from her broken speech, of the cause
Tried some knowledge to obtain.

"Perhaps," said she, "'twas the water from the well;
A bitter taste it had, but what made it so I could not tell.
Some pure cold water give me, oh, Naphtali dear!
To quench this awful thirst that burns me here."

But there was not a drop of water in the house that
day,
For Rachel herself had thrown it all away.

So he waited anxiously for Ishbak
That he might obtain the longed-for draught;
But, alas, before medical aid was summoned,
She had passed beyond their thought.

With a smile of inexpressible peace, that day,
Little Rachel, as she so often wished,
Went to dwell in the house of God alway.

How can we describe the deep anguish of Naphtali
As he gazed upon his darling there?
Or the keener pang of Ishbak, who loved
The beautiful spirit, as man can love only once?
Great his sorrow as he knelt beside the form so fair.

Very anxious from the first were they to see
What the cause of little Rachel's sudden death
might be.
Her own words about the water furnished the only
clew,
But Ishbak with ready sagacity the whole tragedy
well knew.

He had followed Rachel that very day as far as the
well;
Paler she was than usual, yet exactly
Why he had followed her, himself could scarcely tell.

At a distance he had perceived the woman coming
near,
What her errand was, now to him was clear.

Not a doubt had he that the water she
Had given little Rachel poisoned was:
"Athaliah was jealous of one whom she knew not
to be
Your sister,—without a cause.
Afraid the dreadful deed herself to commit,
Doubtless she instigated her mother to do it.

"Would to God the wicked Athaliah
Had never crossed our path;
Accuse you, Naphtali, I never will,
For yielding to the natural impulse of your heart at
last.

"Rebuke the forbidden desire I know you did,
And I do honor you for your self-control;
But, oh, Naphtali, had you Athaliah's
Character read at the first,
Might we not yet our darling's face behold?"

"Ishbak, can it really be as you say?
I would have died for my sister any day."

Ishbak answered, tenderly, "Your brotherly
Affection for Rachel I well know;

But for Athaliah is this strong love
Now quenched, God's power to show."

Oh, the regret that filled Naphtali's heart
As he listened to Ishbak's words!
Now to seek forgiveness as David did,—
This thought within him stirred.

With a subdued and chastened heart,
Naphtali took up again his daily burden in life's part.

The sudden departure of Athaliah and her
Parents from the city, Naphtali's heart relieved;
But the suspicions of Ishbak were confirmed,
For in her guilt he fully believed.

But in the hands of God Ishbak wisely let the matter rest,
And Naphtali very willing was to acquiesce.

For he dreaded to believe that the beautiful
Athaliah could lead
Her mother to the doing of such a wicked deed.

Very suddenly the dark cloud closed
O'er Naphtali's home;
Yet it seemed but a forerunner
Of the great national calamity to come.

Slowly the work of the temple had been
Progressing all this time;
The people of the land every endeavor had used
To hinder the building they could find.

The leaders of their adversaries wrote a letter
To Artaxerxes, the Persian king:
"Be it known unto the king that,
If the walls of this city be rebuilded,
It will endanger thy revenue,
Because toll and tribute these people will not bring.

"Therefore we certify to the king, that in
The book of records search may be made."
Without making a true search into the
Real cause of the great rebuilding,
In return the king's message was,
That aside their work be laid.

Thus for a time the faithful "remnant"
Their unfinished work oft viewed;
Yet it was God's work, they knew, and
Could not perish, but again would be renewed.

CHAPTER X.

CROWNING THE TEMPLE.

PASSING over an interval of fifteen years,
Let us look in upon Jerusalem
And see how it appears.

No longer is it a vast and desolated place,
Many happy homes the once deserted city now do grace.

Yet, as year after year has passed away,
There lies the work of God's great temple,
Bearing only new marks of decay.

A striking contrast to the gray pile of stones
Are the children's happy faces at their play;
Perfectly at home in the enclosure
Are a little boy and girl to-day.

Little Thar and Rachel were playing near their home,
Arranging for the temple a wreath,
That, in his childish ambition, little Thar said
Was to crown the topmost stone.

Absorbed so in his movements Rachel was
That coming footsteps she did not hear,
Till Ishbak laid his hand upon her shoulder
And smiled into the dear familiar face so near.

Naphtali's daughter little Rachel was,
A namesake of the sister who had died;
For this reason the grave Ishbak loved her,
And she was found ever near his side.

"Why are you so serious, uncle dear, to-day?"
Anxiously questioned she, in her childish way.
"Not serious, only lost in thought, I was.
Has Thar's good father, in speaking of the
Hinderance of the temple, ever told him of the
cause?"

"Why, yes, Thar," said Rachel; "do you not know
That papa said it was the people of the land?"
"But some tried to go on with the work after
The wicked king died; your father was
Among the last by the work to stand."

"And were you not there, uncle?" little
Rachel questioned still.
"Oh, yes, little one, by your father's side
I always worked with a right good will.

"One by one we laid aside our tools,
Convinced the time for rebuilding the Lord's house

Had not yet come to us."
"Will it ever come, uncle?" whispered Rachel.
"Oh, yes; by and by God will permit us to finish
it, I trust."

And, as if forgetful of the children's presence,
"Strange," thought he, "these questions
Should follow me everywhere."
The absent mind of her uncle
She could not understand, as she gazed
Up into his face, so thoughtful there.

"Uncle dear," as in his her little brown hand he
drew,
"I am sorry with so many questions to have troubled
you."

"You trouble me, little ones?" as, rousing from
His reverie, he answered; "my dears, I say
I love to hear you talk; as many questions as you
Like you may ask alway.

"But here is Rachel's wreath all finished,
And on the topmost stone it shall be placed."
Thus the beginning of God's house
The children's work hath graced.

Carefully over the stones he stepped,
And reached the topmost one;
The children, clapping their hands with delight,
Exclaimed, "Oh, I am glad 'tis done."

The well-known words came to his mind,—
"A little child shall lead them."
For the crowning of the stone a double meaning had to him.

"God's house the children have been fixing up to-day;
They, indeed, the great work have begun:
The signs shall we not understand and obey?
And this simple wreath of flowers, shall it not be
A pledge of whole-soul offerings that we yet may see?"

So reasoned Ishbak, as with the happy children home he turns,
And with the thought a new lightness of heart he learns.

Naphtali on the porch meets him as in former years,
And the children romp and play with papa without fears.

Naphtali to give up the work of the temple
Among the last had been;
During the years of waiting he had laid by
Offerings as God had prospered him.

But the past years to the Jewish people
Had not prosperous been;

Drought had stinted their crops, and sickness
Their numbers had thinned.

For no longer upon this people rested God's holy
smile,
Yet with blinded eyes they labored on the while.
To amass for themselves treasures they labored in
great haste,
While they saw God's temple still lying waste.

"Oh, Ishbak, you yourself have the prophet
heard."
"Yes, but I have almost doubted the inspiration of
his word,—
It has seemed so impossible for us to do any more
Towards the temple of the Lord with famine at our
door."

Naphtali answered, "Rebuke us strongly Haggai
does, you know,
And declares that God's displeasure is the cause
Of our crops around us failing so.

"I've longed to cry with a loud voice,
And urge our people the great work to renew;
But my words, what could they do
To arouse the multitude?
The voice of God's prophet is needed, it is true.

"His voice, ever since I heard it, has been ringing
in my ear;
Ah, Naphtali, I doubt those solemn truths no longer,
But they my sad heart cheer.
'*Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses,
and this house to lie waste?*'

"I believe the hour is drawing near
When the message from God's prophet they will
hear;
But look, there is a courier at our door!"
Little Thar had spied the messenger some time before.

And he came running to Naphtali with cheeks all
aglow:
"'Tis a servant, father, from the house of Prince
Zerubbabel, you know.
An important message for you and uncle," he says:
"I wonder what it may be."

"Why, my boy, you should not curious be
About such grave matters that concern only me.
Run back to sister," said Naphtali, kissing his up-
turned face;
Then, stooping down, he clasped him in a close em-
brace.

"Uncle and I will attend to the courier, too."
Very reluctantly he obeyed, for he was a zealous little
Jew.

But his father's words were as law, he knew full
well;
So he hastened back to Rachel, eager the news to tell.

Meanwhile, Ishbak and Naphtali,
With deep interest, listening were
To the important tidings of the messenger.

To God's prophet, the prince of Judah
And Jeshua the chosen priest, had given a listening
ear;
Their whole souls now were stirred,
For there was nothing more to fear.

And the completion of God's great temple
They were eager to hasten on.
Like a command from heaven to Ishbak
And Naphtali, this news did come.

And the response went back to Zerubbabel:
"Thy servants are ready, O prince,
With willing hearts and waiting hands
The great work to commence."

Once again on Mount Moriah, in the enclosures grand,
The hills and vales around sent back cheery echoes
o'er the land.

From the topmost stone the withered wreath was
pushed away,
But in its place the polished shaft was laid one day.

Into Naphtali's home let us take a peep,
And see what changes have been made with each passing year.
The same old house it is, but desolate no longer
Are the halls that even little Rachel's smiles could not wholly cheer.

Merrily ringing are children's voices
Among the busy household things;
From a soft, sweet voice a low sound comes,—
'Tis a mother's lullaby as to her babe she sings.

While Thar and little Rachel in the cool, pleasant yard,
With brother David their merry rompings keep;
With a gentle loving smile she watches them
While she rocks her little one to sleep.

Now a simple picture it is, but one I think
That God's angels love to see;
What sweeter boon can he bestow than this,
A home where rest and peace may be?

The fair Deborah of her own happy life
Is not thinking to-day;
Other thoughts in her mind are awakened,
As her own little Rachel glances up from play.

For she greatly resembled the other Rachel
Whose life had been blighted so,
And the sweet baby face recalls the one
She learned to love so many years ago.

She had listened to her brother Ishbak's suspicions
With incredulous ears;
"If they were true had the guilty one gone
Unpunished all these years?

"Ah, well, what does it matter now
To the happy sainted Rachel?"
Came the after-thought;
So Deborah mused as the shadows lengthened,
And smiles to the little babe the angels brought.

Suddenly a loud rap on the outer door there came,
While all the sleeping echoes sent back a quick refrain;
In Deborah's arms it awoke the sleeping child;
All out of breath a wee boy was standing
At the door the while.

In broken sentences, to Deborah's questions,
Answered he in fright:
"On the outskirts of the city, for the singer Naphtali
A dying woman is calling loud to-night.

Will not the master at once to the home of the sick
woman come?
For she may die before arises the morning sun."

Before Deborah could reply, Naphtali and Ishbak
were at her side;
From the temple they had just come,
And the well-known singer the lad had spied.

He hastened then his errand to repeat,—
"But who may this woman be of whom you speak?"
"That I cannot tell," the boy replies;
"But the whole neighborhood is disturbed
By listening to her cries."

To Deborah Naphtali says, "Shall I go, my dear?"
"Do as you think best, my husband, I can trust you
anywhere."
"But with me, Deborah, you must go."
"You can tell me all about it, and
Our little ones need me, you know."

"Then, farewell," as if some sudden gleam of light
had crossed his mind;
Turning to the lad: "Direct me to the woman's
house,
And what she wants I'll find."

The command was soon obeyed,
And in an hour or more

Naphtali and his guide came to the
Dying woman's door.

"Louder call him, louder!" a piercing voice shrieked there;
It made Naphtali shudder as the tones he then did hear.

Less changed was the ring of Athaliah's clear voice
Than the haggard face that greeted him,—that face once his choice.

How on that beautiful countenance
With weight the years had leaned!
Once in the radiant bloom of youth
Fascinating indeed it seemed.

"Naphtali! thank God, you have come at last!
The whole story you must know, before
From this life I have passed.
These people from the room, Naphtali, now must go;
I have not long to live, and this secret you alone must know."

He, half guessing what the revelation was to be,
Complied with her request immediately.

"Oh, Naphtali, forgive, do forgive! I am dying now, you see."
"I do forgive, my poor Athaliah, as I would forgiven be."

"But, Naphtali, you cannot know all the
Wrong to you I've done:
Not knowing who she was, I was jealous
Of her who was dearer to you than any one.

"To poison the water for your sister,
My mother I did guide,"
With fearful strength the suffering woman then
replied.

"She, stricken by the pestilence, dying, to me did
say,
'Oh, Athaliah, Athaliah, take this load of guilt
away!'"

With one wild look she clasped Naphtali's hand;
He saw that she was fast passing away to that "far-
off land."

A feeling of indignation for a moment to him came,
But he checked it quickly, and it passed away
again.
Then he, of his long-suffering Father thought,
And sweet words of comfort to the dying brought.

"'Slow to anger and plenteous in mercy is our Lord,'
He would have us lean upon his gracious word.
'He will not always chide, neither his anger always
keep,'

For as the heaven is high above the earth,
So is his mercy who neither slumber knows, nor sleep."

As Naphtali ceased, suddenly arose
Before him a vision of by-gone years,—
How the same words to his master Shethar
He had spoken once in tears.

Then Athaliah's face seemed to change
Into Shethar's countenance who was far away,
For he had repeated those very words
To the wounded nobleman on that never-to-be-forgotten day.

To the penitent man the comfort they
Had brought was sweet,
And to Athaliah in like manner
He hoped they would be meet.

Now the death-angel quickly to her came;
The pale fingers soon relaxed,
And she lost that agonizing look of pain.

A bright smile for an instant lighted the dying face,
Then passed away as she was clasped
In death's cold, stern embrace.

Her spirit, indeed, to the righteous Judge had passed.
Would she find in him the reconciled Father at last?

Did peace come with the penitential smile
That lighted up her once fair brow?
Only eternity could answer these questions now.

That night, in their happy home,
When he the story did relate,
In heart-felt sympathy, their revenge
They could see in her sad fate.

Athaliah's terrible secret was never spread abroad;
Charity covered it from all save the righteous God.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WORK PROGRESSING.

Progressing now they were on Mount Moriah;
A new prophet to them had been revealed,
Zechariah with Haggai in earnest labor
Putting his own shoulder to the wheel.

The promises, now given there, were rich and glorious
For these inspired men to share.
To Zerubbabel, their prince, to Jeshua, their priest, with one accord,
And to the people, came commendations from God's glorious word.

Thus spake the Lord: "Be strong, all ye people,
And labor on, for I am with you in this work begun.
I will shake all nations before me,
And will fill this house with glory which ye shall see.
And this latter glory greater than the first shall be,
And in this place will I give peace," saith he.

Then Zechariah for the chosen race swelled the theme
That Haggai with exalted cry did begin:

"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for lo!
I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee."

How this building was to surpass Solomon's
Magnificent temple, they could not understand;
But God's word is sure, and they doubted not
In the power of his command.

Some of the elder Jews were instructed
In holy writ; hence
They believed it embraced the appearing
Of their long-expected prince.

But the younger ones, who gloried in the outward
Beauties of their faith,
Believed that untold riches would adorn
The humble temple of their race.

But in renewed opposition, silence to the
People of the land they could not easily bring;
Governor Tatnai and his friends, as a last resort,
Sent a letter to the king:

"Would king Darius examine these wonderful statements of the Jews,
And let the messenger return with the speedy news?"

As they worked willingly day by day,
Marked changes they saw in basket and store;

The mildew no longer blasted their ripening grain
As in the days of yore.

There was scarcely a Jew or Gentile
Who did not wait impatiently the returned news to hear:
When months passed and still no answer came,
That the records could not be found, they began to fear.

"It is very strange, I think," said Ishbak to Naphtali one day;
"I wonder if this proclamation retained has been or thrown away.
How much time and trouble could have been saved had they to it seen!
Think you any help will come from Darius the king?"
"Most assuredly I do, Ishbak.
In Babylon zealous supporters we yet have, I trust:
There is good Lord Shethar, if in his power,
I know that he will help us.
Did I tell you I sent a message to our noble lord?"
"Why, no, Naphtali; how is it you could send this word?"

"Through the kindness of Tatnai, who, you know, Ishbak, is my friend,
This letter to Lord Shethar I found that I could send.

Hastily I sent it, for the possibility of so doing
Did not occur to me
Until the courier just starting was,
Or I would have inquired if any message
You had to send, you see."

"Most gladly my humble regards I would have sent;
But of me Lord Shethar no pleasant remembrance
Had, after away from him I went."

"A severe judge of yourself, Ishbak, you are, I see;
But I have not forgotten how well your
Daily task was performed in bondage spent with me.
I do not wonder that the yoke hard to you did
appear,
For then the Lord of hosts you had not learned to
love and fear."

"Dark days indeed, Naphtali, they were then to me;
But 'twas my own wilful blindness made them so,
you see.
Enveloped still in the dark cloud I might have
been
Had not God given me such a faithful friend."

Naphtali exclaimed, "Naught of the glory can be
given to me, when
In the hands of God are the lives and hearts of
men.

And I do bless him for such a noble friend," continued he;
"As David's soul unto Jonathan's was knit,
So has mine been unto thee."

When in Babylon, indeed, neither of them knew
Of the life-long friendship that between them would arise,
For then weary were their days
And clouded were their skies.

But God was linking their lives then
By ways they did not know,
By indissoluble bands that in after years would show.

This conversation took place one morning
As to the temple they wended their way,
As usual, to engage in the labor of the day.

But when to the temple they came near at hand,
They found that new materials now were in demand.

With idle tools their unfinished work they view,
And interrogate among themselves
For means their work to renew.

"Is there no one," questioned a laborer, "in the whole company here
Who a free-will offering with his God will share?"

"Verily," from many lips there went the words around,
"I know not where among us such a one may be found.
For he who has the will this thing to do,
The means he has not that we may the work pursue."

As Naphtali and Ishbak took their morning walk,
The generous impulses that filled Naphtali's heart
Were strengthened by their talk,
And he longed to lend a helping hand,
Now that he saw them making a demand.

The consecrated stone, had he not gladly laid?
Many offerings besides he had freely made.
Deborah of her substance willingly had spent,
With a ready mind much to the Lord she had lent.
And the only thing that now remained
Was the labor of strong hands and active brains.

But stay! there was one more offering that could yet be made,
The gold and silver coin that he by had laid.
'Twas the little ones' and Rachel's dowry, it is true.
Was God calling for this last offering, too?

This last offering Naphtali hesitated for a moment
To give unto the Lord,

When before his mind came a message
From David's word:
"*The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.*"

No further assurance needed he,
But to Ishbak whispered, "It shall be."

The few words that in an undertone had passed,
On the house-top Ishbak made them known at last.

And as an electric spark from tongue to tongue it flew,
And ere nightfall Naphtali's noble act
Not only was made known,
But imitated by many a zealous Jew.

Meanwhile, the God of Judah was preparing for his people
New triumphs from on high;
Not one self-denying act had escaped
His ever-watchful eye.

Now the day came when an answer
To Tatnai's letter to them was brought;
Dread and curiosity now filled their every thought.

When the contents of this royal epistle,
Which they so highly prized,

Was read and published abroad,
Naphtali's hopes were more than realized.

King Darius was satisfied with the asserted
Right of the Jews;
Not only did he second the decree of Cyrus,
But whosoever the builders troubled, should they
choose,
Or the decree of Cyrus alter, there should be
Timber from his house pulled down,
And himself hanged thereon immediately.

Moreover, help from the king's own goods
They should have without delay
And tribute beyond the river,
That their work might prosper from day to day.
And appointed sacrifices should be daily made with-
out fail,
So that sweet savors might ascend to the God
Of heaven, and their prayers for the king
Would not be without avail.

Then his decree, as if to make it stronger still,
He closed with this warning:
"And the God that has caused his people in Israel
to dwell,
All kings and people destroy with speed,
Who put forth their hand God's house to alter,
At Jerusalem: thus I, Darius, have decreed."

CHAPTER XII.

BRIGHTNESS AT LAST.

NAPHTALI had scarcely recovered from the news
when
Shethar a gracious epistle to him did send.
Rich gifts of gold and silver sent the nobleman from
afar,
With changes of garments for his namesake, little
Shethar.

The few modest words he wrote convinced Naphtali
That in Babylon he had no firmer friend;
Repaid, indeed, with interest, was he,
For all that he unto the Lord did lend.

And now from all quarters help there came,
For Darius's decree was not to be altered but firm to
remain.

Oh, the two glad years that followed day by day
While rose in splendor and beauty the temple on its
way!

No Urim nor Thummim as yet, nor dread Shekinah,
Appeared in the sacred place;

But constantly God's blessing rested
Upon his chosen race.

Through young Zechariah came his word richer than before;
At evening-time Naphtali and Ishbak
Would recall each glowing word
Which from the lips of this young prophet they had heard.

Listening to their discussions, Deborah felt her need;
Indeed, to these prophecies, all the people gave much heed.

"Well, Ishbak, what think you this young prophet spoke about
When he talked of the four horns that scattered
Israel, Jerusalem, and Judah, and the
Four carpenters that are to cast these out?"

"Ah, Naphtali, these questions difficult will be
To settle in our mind,
For perplexed about them I have often been inclined.

"Yet sometimes I wonder if profitable it would not be,
To take them now on faith and let the ages prove each prophecy."

"Ishbak, these questions may cloud our faith
Which we have heard;
But God will never rebuke any humble inquirer
Seeking to know his word."

"I do truly believe that may be, but, of my own
Feeble effort to understand them, let me tell;
These four horns, to me, seem the several hostile
Kings that have oppressed Judah and Israel."

"In your far-seeing sagacity great confidence
I have, you know;
Yet I thought, Ishbak, the four horns meant
The four tribes that have harassed us so.

"The Ammonites and Samaritans, the
Arabians and Philistines, I mean;
These four nations a constant scourge to us have
seemed."

"But did they ever really *scatter* Israel and Judah,
As the prophecy would show?"
"Of the *exact* meaning of the saying
I have never thought, you know.

"In the wrong I perceive I may be,
But the true solution I thought I'd found, you see."

"Just as widely at fault, Naphtali,
As yours, may be mine;

Some think the carpenters raised up
As instruments are to defend the cherished faith, I find."

"Well, whatever meaning is correct, it assures us
The great God is mindful of us still."
"And that is quite enough for me," said
Deborah's low, sweet voice at will.

Now Naphtali's cheery voice recounts the vision
Of the horseman among the myrtle-trees,
The man with the measuring line,
The golden candlesticks, all of which Zechariah sees.

But concerning the coming mystery,
Naphtali displayed the same bright hope
That he had always shown;
He knew the great Jehovah's arm around
About his people still was thrown.

The holy city of Jerusalem yet wealth and glory would receive,
And by and by would come more glorious promises than these.

The coming of a greater help than Jeshua
Or Zerubbabel was foretold to them,—

Even the coming of the Branch, of whom
The great high priest could be but the faintest emblem.

* * * * * * * *

Tis now the month Adah, and the third day,
Ishbak and Naphtali ascend the Mount of
Olives on their happy way.
Thar and little Rachel, light-hearted children still,
In their merry glee chase each other up the hill.

And awake the slumbering echoes with
Shouts of joy do they;
A *white* day in the Jewish calendar
This is, while old and young with grateful hearts obey.

It is easy to guess the reason why they hasten to this place
For the *finished* temple rises before them
In all its matchless grace.

And the crowning glory of an Oriental sunset there doth shine;
Naphtali's poetic mind this picture
Long had anticipated in this place divine.

"Oh, father, how beautiful!" exclaimed little Rachel, with claspéd hands,
As she watched the quivering sunset,

While Naphtali thoughtful stands,
But never a word answers he,
For he is deeply absorbed in reverie.

With the dream of his life now realized,
His thoughts turn back to by-gone years,
And as a way-worn traveller he stands, with
Rachel, who was doubtful and full of fears.

Oh, the desolation of Mount Moriah, as in sackcloth
And ashes then sat she:
No wonder little Rachel's expectant heart failed her
When the barren waste she then did see.

"The beauty of it," now thought he, "is it within
her sight?
Or is the unseen heavenly temple more radiant with
light?

"Are all earthly scenes forgotten by this sainted
soul?"
Then tears filled this strong man's eyes,
Sin thy sister sacrificed, came up again tenfold.

Yet he doubted not her cross she had laid down
In heaven to wear a far more glorious crown.
"But earth," he thought, "too soon had lost
The radiance of her life at such a bitter cost."

Ishbak, reading Naphtali's thoughts as he gazed so
far away,
With no curious questions troubled him that day;

But silenced little Thar when, impatiently,
He asked why papa looked so sad
When others seemed so glad to be.

I could almost believe little Rachel's spirit hovered
near,
So sweetly from Naphtali's sensitive soul the clouds
at last did disappear.

For are they not all "ministering spirits," you see,
Sent forth to those who "heirs of salvation" are
to be?

Behold, yonder the evening sacrifice now ascends,
While glad thanksgiving chants their charms to
Olivet lend.

Little Thar, too, takes up the strain,
And in the gladness of his heart sings the great re-
frain.

"Break forth and sing together, ye places lying waste,
For again it will be seen
That by his holy arm all nations yet shall see
Jerusalem redeemed."

Ere the sentence finished was, Naphtali's
Voice had joined the theme;
And ere the echo back was sent, Ishbak
Sealed it with Amen.

The stars one by one came out as the fiery
Glow in the west sank down,
Adding new beauty and grandeur to Mount Moriah's
crown.

Soon the heavy dew was beginning fast to fall,
Reminding Naphtali of his tender loving charge,
above all.

As they near their peaceful home,
A snow-white lamb from the bramble-bushes comes
And nestles close down by little Rachel's side;
He long had been her playful pet and guide.

"Oh, papa, do you not see
How dearly well my Beda loveth me?"
"And his love to you, my darling, shows
Your kindness to him he fully knows."

"Papa, may I not always have him for my very
own?"
"Yes, darling, for the love to him you have ever
shown.

On the porch yonder your mother stands, with beaming face,
Now let me see you with your nimble Beda run a race."

Rachel with her father's wishes did instantly agree,
And in a moment by her mother's side stood, laughing merrily,
Clasping her hands in childish glee at her better fate,
Thinking she had so far outstripped her little mate.

The completion of the second temple with joy their hearts did fill,
Through the glad Feast Days succeeding we will follow still.

First, the glorious dedication came,
Inferior doubtless to that which marked the pomp
Of Solomon's edifice, yet the same.
The children of Israel, the Levites, and the
Rest of the captives, with one accord,
As befitted their beautiful religion, held
The dedication in the house of the Lord.

Unto the Lord for a sacrifice was offered
A hundred bullocks and two hundred rams;

And for a sin-offering, according to the tribes of
Israel,
Twelve he-goats and a sacrifice of four hundred
lambs.

A part of the blood before the altar was poured
out,
A part sprinkled on the horns of the altar of incense,
And a part by the priest in the most holy place was
laid;
For thus God had commanded that
The sin-offering should be made.

Afterwards followed the chants and anthems
In God's house of prayer;
"*In the beauty of holiness,*" the temple received
Another crowning, of which the sunset glory
Was but a type in its beauty there.

A forerunner, this imposing ceremony,
Of the matchless glory that would be revealed;
No ark, no mercy-seat, no sacred fire, was therein
concealed.

"But with glory I will fill this sacred house for
you,
With greater glory than the former temple ever
knew.

"Rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem, and behold thy
king,
He is just and having salvation, lowly to him sweet
tributes bring.

"To your stronghold turn ye, prisoners of hope,"
In ecstasies of joy, thus sang Zechariah;
And to many a glad believing heart he spoke.

That consecration day in Zion long to be remembered
was;
Without, all nature seemed to conspire in bringing
Rich tithes to the holy cause.

For lo! the weary winter now was passed,
And the singing of the happy birds had come again
at last.

The voice of the turtle once more in the land was
heard,
Olivet's green slopes were redolent with the
Fragrance which the wild flowers stirred.

Putting forth green figs the glad trees were,
While the verdure of the olive-groves gave promise
rich and rare.

Sweet anthems of praise resounded from within,
And Mount Moriah with holy joy
Seemed to tremble at the theme.

The valleys caught the inspiration of the strain,
From their gray depths, the dying notes
Received new impulse and re-echoed back again :
" It is finished, it is finished !"

The modest heights of Calvary, half a mile away
stood there,
Whose rough slopes in coming ages a repetition
Of that strain would hear.

A last stroke was yet to be given to a greater temple
done
Than ever graced Moriah's height, even the
Living temple of God's own Son.

A temple which, though to the ground it should be
razed,
Yet, according to the prophecy, should again
Arise in three short days.

But naught of all this sad, sweet mystery
The happy, exultant Jews did dream ;
They thought, after intervening years,
In great glory would come their king.

So dazzled were they with thoughts of his divine
majesty and power,
They dreamed not of the cross of Calvary or Geth-
semane's dark hour.

Among the preparations made when the Passover
Feast began,
A sacrificial home-offering was demanded,—a spotless
lamb.

In the great congregation there was one little heart
That in the coming festivities could not gladly take
a part.

Little Rachel for her pet lamb was grieved to tears,
For she anticipated the sacrifice of Beda
With many doubts and fears.

The one perfect lamb that had been reserved for the
sacrificial day,
Had either been stolen from the flock or wandered
far away.

The tenth day of Nisan had arrived at last,
The day for selecting the lamb as the Mosaic law had
passed.

No one in all the flock, save Rachel's pet, could they
see
That from spot and blemish was entirely free.

Little Rachel with a trembling heart
Had learned all this one day,
And with bitter grief in her heart
From them turned away.

Naphtali had not forgotten the promise
To his daughter he had made,—
That all her own the lamb should be,
Just as he had said.

To the troubled child the tenth day of Nisan
A whole age seemed;
Expecting every hour her pet to lose,
On whose fond love she leaned.

To caress Beda all the morning she had not ceased,
Hiding her blinding tears in its snow-white fleece.

Naphtali asked her to accompany him to the temple for a walk,
Saying that with them the little lamb might be brought.

Not a word of the coming feast to the child did he say,
But various points of the temple pointed out to her on the way.

"How many great and grand things, papa, God to us doth bring!"
She said, as he was telling her of the loving-kindness Of Israel's King.

"Yes, darling, his mercies are fresh every morning
And night to the children of men,
For his great goodness towards us, what shall
We render unto him?"

"Often you have told me, papa,
Our whole hearts to him we must give;
And the things, I suppose, that we most love
He would fain receive."

"If asked of us, it must not be denied,
But seldom such sacrifice is required," Naphtali
gently replied.

Little Rachel was now in tears, for to her it seemed
That God was calling her pet lamb a sacrifice to
bring.
"Oh, father, I know now what you mean for me to
give,
But I am sure God is too good not to let my pet
lamb live.

"Why would not the lame sheep yonder
Make a sacrifice complete?"
Her excited question he answered not, but bade
Her sit on the grassy bank there at his feet.

"Listen, darling, I will tell you once again
The sad and beautiful story of the

Innocents who once were slain.
It will help you better to bear this bitter trial
Which now seems to you so very hard, my child."

This touching story she had often heard
But to-day there seemed to be a new meaning in
every word.

In her father's glowing words, she could see
Before her the great company of Egypt's bondmen,
And Pharaoh's hardened face there seemed to be,
Then the implicit obedience of the trusting
Israelites, as Moses, by God's ways,
Bade each take a lamb without spot or blemish
And slay it for the coming days.

And as Naphtali described the fearful visit
Of the death-angel, it seemed that she
All that long night his dusky wings could see.

"Only the blood-marked posts of Israel's faithful
band
Had sufficient power to stay the avenging hand.
And think you, Rachel, any one that night
Would have hesitated, even a pet lamb to give
For a sacrifice that a precious human soul might live?"

"In our day, papa, did you not tell me
The Passover was a memorial feast." "But

God's word, Rachel, is God's word now
Just as truly as then, at least."

"Oh, yes, father, it must be so, I see!
So weak and childish any more I will not be.

"What if God should take Thar from me,
Because the pet lamb I did not want to bring."
And she shuddered at the very thought of such a thing.
"Think you he will, father?" as she slipped
The scarlet cord into his hand, blushing thus to speak.
"No, darling, God is more kind to his obedient
Children," replied he, stooping down to kiss her crimson cheek.

"We will pray that our little Shethar he will spare
And accept this offering for the coming feast."
"Poor Beda, I am sorry for him!" said Rachel,
As she hid her wet cheeks in his snow-white fleece.

"But to give him up I am willing,
Because I know it is God's command;
So take him away now, father; to play longer
With him I cannot stand."

"My brave little daughter!" was Naphtali's reply;
And as little Shethar joined them, he added,

"Go children to the neighbors nigh,
And invite them the feast to share
On the approaching fourteenth day;
More than for us it will suffice, and, according
To our law, naught must be set away.

The children quickly hastened their father's word to obey,
And the invitations accepted were without delay.
Rachel hastened home, her mission now fulfilled,
While Thar in the opposite direction climbed up Olivet's hill.

"What has happened?" she quickly to him did say,
When hurriedly from the hill he came away.

"I was chasing a little butterfly up the hill,
When beyond the bramble-bush it flew,
And I was caught at will.
It had led me to a bleating lamb close by,
Entangled in the bushes, from which it
Could not escape, much as it might try.
I did my best to rescue the poor thing,
That from the entangled thicket
I might at last it bring.
A beautiful lamb it is, sister, but its
Frantic efforts to get away must give it pain;
Come, Rachel, need your help I will."
And seizing a knife, he bounded up the hill again.

Rachel understood the meaning of his hurried
words.
"Was Beda saved?" this first thought in her bosom
stirred.

At all events, the lamb in the thicket
Her father she would tell about,
Trusting that Shethar's stout knife would
Take the struggling sufferer out.

Rachel was overjoyed to find her beautiful Beda alive
still,
And ere long Thar returned with the released lamb
from the hill.

They found it was the very one marked
Months ago for the Paschal feast,
Robbed a little of its outer covering, but free
From spot or blemish it was at least.

So the pet Beda was restored to Rachel that very
day,
And with it the keen sorrow of the sensitive child
passed away.

For the thrifty housewives, busy days
Were those that intervened;
After the Paschal supper, the seven
Days of unleavened bread were seen.

On the thirteenth day, when the sun went down
And shone the twilight star,
Each family, gathering in groups around
Their boards, assembled near and far.

"Purified," says Holy Writ, the priests and Levites were;
And they killed the Passover for the children of captivity
And themselves to share.

And the children of Israel, and all who
Had laid aside their heathen superstitions
For the Jewish faith, did eat,—
With joy the feast of unleavened bread
To the Lord did keep.

Ah! never before had the children of captivity
Known such glad feast-days;
For who but the great Jehovah could have
Turned the Assyrian's heart,
And strengthened their hands to complete
The work of God's house in every part?

Let us into Naphtali's home take a look
On those bright, happy feast-days:
Little Thar and Rachel are sitting at his feet,
Listening to the story he repeats
Of God's wondrous ways.

How the bread was taken in haste
From the kneading-trough,
And each, of his neighbor, borrowed jewels
And money of wages long withheld, to pay the cost.

He tells them of God's wonderful care
Over his people, the long wilderness through;
And he tells them of the captives' weary life in
Babylon too,
And of the tender Father's untiring care
That followed his obedient children there.
"Impenetrable the dark cloud of captivity
Never quite has been;
But a cloud it is, that the breathing of God's
Holy word is constantly making thin."

The children a little puzzled looked the while,
But Deborah and Ishbak heartily responded
To Naphtali's happy smile.

"The rifts of blue," spoke the latter, "have widened
To take in the sun's bright face."
"Verily," responded Naphtali, as he sung aloud
A psalm of praise with simple grace;
While at Deborah's knee
The little one laughed
And crowed in merry glee.

That night, indeed, the whole house seemed
A cage of singing birds,

And this was only one of the happy dwellings
In the city that with sweet music stirred.
But happy captives singing birds most surely are;
And yet, when the song is done,
For cagéd birds, there is still the wire.

It matters not that to-day the sun is shining bright,
The clouds again may gather and hide the present
light.
Ah! the captivity of the Jews was not all removed,
But only the shadow lifted
And a bit of the dark cloud widely rifted.

Naphtali and his companions in the
Widest rift we leave, it seems;
Although good old Zilpah, little Rachel,
And Amram are not here to catch
The passing gleams.

Let us picture to ourselves the halo
Of unapproachable light,
That the brows of these faithful ones
Are crownéd with to-night.

For they have passed beyond the shadow
Of the cloud to the glorious shore;
Their feet may never tread the Jewish
Temple, a temple not made with hands
Is theirs forever more.

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